

ROOTS IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD
Joseph Shulam's Messianic Jewish Ecclesiology

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat</p> <p>This thesis is an analysis of the concepts of the ecclesiology of Joseph Shulam (1946–), and the ways how it seeks to transform Christian theology and praxis as it is shown in his published writings.</p> <p>In the first chapter, I present an introduction to Messianic Judaism, its history and core theological issues. Messianic Judaism is a form of Judaism that holds that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, standing in the middle ground between Judaism and Christianity. Its core theological issues revolve around negotiating and reconciling between the theological priorities of Judaism and Christianity. In ecclesiology, this is shown in the different models of conceiving the people of God as a community of Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus, and the role of the majority of the Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus as the Messiah.</p> <p>The second chapter is an analysis of Shulam's theological paradigm of roots. Shulam understands the essence of roots to be the correct understanding and living out the teachings of the Bible. The correct understanding is based on a concrete and indexical relationship between the biblical revelation and reality. Traditional Christian creeds and allegorical, spiritualizing interpretations are rejected as unbiblical "human doctrines" that alienates the biblical text from faith rooted in reality.</p> <p>In the third chapter, I analyze the three core elements of Shulam's ecclesiology: God, Israel and the Church. The spiritual life of the people of God is based on the conviction that there is only one God who is the Creator and Father of all living beings and this faith is meant to unite all humankind and restore it to its original wholeness. The Messiah, whom Shulam considers divine, is God's instrument for enabling people to live in relationship with God. Israel is the physical, ethnic people of Israelites, nowadays known as Jews. Israel is the elect people of God, and by election Shulam means being chosen for the mission to restore the knowledge of God and erase the darkness of idolatry. The Church is the fulfillment of this mission and the extension of Israel that is made of Gentiles who join the "commonwealth of Israel" and become heir to Israel's spiritual blessings through faith in Messiah together with the Jewish believers.</p> <p>The practical significance of Jewish tradition for Messianic Jews and Christians is analyzed in the fourth chapter. The most central issues are synagogue as a social setting, hermeneutics, the identity of Gentile believer, and how to apply Jewish halakhah to Messianic Jews and Christians. Shulam considers "the seat of Moses" in Matthew 23 a basis for Rabbinic Judaism, the heir to the Pharisees to have an authority to interpret the Scriptures and make halakhic rulings that are, to some extent, binding even for followers of Jesus.</p> <p>The fifth chapter is devoted to conclusions. Shulam's call for a revision or, as he calls it, "restoration", is a multifaceted program, but it revolves around the Christians' relationship to Jews and the idea of Israel. Israel, the Jews, still have an identity as a people of God, holding a divine calling to teach the Torah to the nations, and Orthodox Jews are the heirs to this calling today. This does not remove their need to believe in Jesus as their Messiah and Saviour. But Christians who believe Jesus as a Messiah should, in Shulam's understanding, abandon their denominational Christian traditions, and embrace their faith as a form of Judaism with Jesus at its center.</p>			
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Introduction

In this thesis, I will analyze the ecclesiology of Joseph Shulam (1946–). Shulam is a Messianic Jew living in Jerusalem, Israel. He is the director of Netivyah Bible Instruction Ministry, and an elder at the Roeh Israel synagogue.¹ Ecclesiology is generally referred to as the study of the Church in Christian theology. However, Shulam's scope of ecclesiology encompasses both Jews and Christians, and seeks to give answers to the questions about what their respective identities are in the people of God. His thought is an example of Messianic Jewish theology that questions conventional views on Judaism and Christianity.

My research task is twofold. I will analyze how Shulam construes the people of God as composed of three elements, which are God, Israel and the Church. I will also point out the ways Shulam calls for a change in Christian theology and praxis based on his ecclesiology and the concept of roots.

This study will first set the stage for Shulam's theology in chapter 1, which will offer a brief introduction to the essence of Messianic Judaism and discussion on different models of Messianic Jewish ecclesiology. Chapter 2 is an analysis of Shulam's paradigm that, I believe, governs the formation of his theology. It will discuss his ideas of the roots of faith, and his epistemological principles revealed in his criticism of allegorical interpretation. In chapter 3 his core ecclesiological ideas about God, Israel and the Church are analyzed. Chapter 4 focuses on Shulam's way of adopting Jewish culture and theology into his ecclesiology, most notably hermeneutics and interpretation and application of the Jewish law (*halakhah*) as subjects of Jewish education and thus part of the functions of the people of God. In Chapter 5 I collect Shulam's theology and criticism and formulate my interpretation of the main topics in which Shulam calls for revision, or restoration.

Shulam's published texts will be my source of analysis. The most crucial source will be his pamphlet, *Planted in the House of the Lord: God, Israel and the Church*, where he states his most central claims about his ecclesiology. Other writings are a pamphlet on hermeneutics, *Hidden Treasures: The First Century Jewish Way of Understanding the Scriptures*, his articles in the *Teaching from Zion* magazine pertinent to the subject, and commentaries on the books of Romans, Galatians and Acts that he has co-authored with Hilary Le Cornu.

¹ URL: <http://www.netivyah.org/about/joseph-shulam/> (accessed 10th Aug 2017)

Whenever I refer to the commentaries, I explicitly attribute the contents to them both (such as “Shulam and Le Cornu state that”). The English Bible citations are from English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise indicated.

The Torah is one of the most central, distinctive and controversial issues in Messianic Judaism, and for this reason needs definition. In its plain sense, Torah means ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’ in Hebrew. As a Jewish term, the Torah has many different meanings. It typically refers to the text of the five books of Moses. But it also refers to the body of Rabbinic Jewish teaching, divided into the Written Torah, which is the Hebrew Bible, and the Oral Torah that is today codified in the Rabbinic literature from the Mishnah onwards, and the Jewish norms and beliefs derived from these sources.²

I will use the term Torah as reference to the practice of religious Jewish lifestyle (not only the text of the Pentateuch or the Hebrew Bible, although it is an essential element of it), including both its distinctively Jewish “ceremonial” customs such as the Sabbath, the festivals and the dietary laws, and its ethical precepts. I will use the terms “Israel” and “the Jews” interchangeably, with reference to the members of the ethnic, cultural and religious group nowadays known as Jews.

1. Theology, Ecclesiology and Messianic Judaism

1.1. Messianic Judaism

Messianic Judaism, as it is lived out today, is a relatively recent and not a well-known religion. Richard Harvey has authored *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach*, which is an overview of the face of Messianic Jewish theology in the twenty-first century, and probably the first of its kind. He has defined Messianic Judaism as

the religion of Jewish people who believe in Jesus (Yeshua) as the promised Messiah. It is a Jewish form of Christianity and a Christian form of Judaism, challenging the boundaries and beliefs of both. The Messianic Jewish Movement refers to the contemporary movement, a renewed expression of the Jewish Christianity of the early church. Messianic Jews construct a new social and religious identity that they express communally in Messianic Jewish Congregations and Synagogues, and in their individual beliefs and practices. Since the early 1970s the significant numbers of Jewish people coming to believe in Jesus and the phenomenon of Messianic Judaism have raised several questions concerning Jewish and Christian identity and theology.³

² Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, xii.

³ Harvey 2009, 1–2.

1.1.1. Who is a Messianic Jew?

One central question of identity in Messianic Jewish theology is, as it is in Jewish theology in general, what makes a person Jewish. There exists a distinction in Messianic Jewish thought between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus, and both refer to a distinct identity or role in the religion. There must be criteria to determine what makes a person Jewish, for the distinction between Jew and Gentile in theological matters is a binary opposition.

The term “Jew” is an anglicized form of the Hebrew word *yehudi* (יהודי) that refers to either a member of the tribe of Judah, or a person dwelling in the province of Judea. The term was used already during the times of writing the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. That time and later in antiquity, it was a term more commonly used by non-Jews, though Jews themselves preferred the term “Israelites”, which emphasized their ancient past. The reason for the transition of terms from “Israelite” to “Jew” has to do with the fact that the Israelite exiles who re-established their state and began the Second Temple period, where largely from the Southern kingdom of Judah.⁴

The question “Who is a Jew?” has a problem of whether a person is Jewish because of his parentage and ancestry, or personal identification to Jewish national identity, lifestyle and history. According to traditional Rabbinic standards, a person is Jewish by being born of a Jewish mother or by formal, intentional conversion to Judaism. This is questioned by the fact that there are people who don’t have a Jewish mother but otherwise Jewish family heritage and/or a devotion to Jewish life, but who are not regarded as Jews by Rabbinical courts. On the other hand, there are those who are accepted as Jews by Rabbinic authorities but who don’t live as Jews.⁵

This problem is also noted by a Messianic Jewish theologian David H. Stern. He discusses it together with the question of what it means to be Messianic, especially a Messianic Jew. According to his definition, a Messianic Jew is a person who is born Jewish, is a “genuine believer” in Jesus, and who at the same time identifies as presently and not formerly Jewish. So he requires both Jewish ancestry or formal conversion to Judaism and personal identification to be Jewish. Being Messianic means to be committed specifically to Jesus as the Messiah, not merely believing in the idea of the coming of the Messiah. He discusses distorted

⁴ Encyclopaedia Judaica: “Jew”.

⁵ Encyclopaedia Judaica: “Jew”.

positions of what he has termed "Sub-Messianic Jews", who is either "too Jewish" or "not Messianic enough", meaning that Jewishness overshadows the Gospel, or "too Gentile", which means that the Jewish identity is cheapened or consciously hidden.⁶

Stern argues for the usage of "Messianic Jew" and avoids the term "Christian" in reference to Jewish believers in Jesus. Though "Messianic" and "Christian" linguistically refer to the same idea of the Messiah or Christ, the latter bears such historical baggage that might become a needless obstacle for Jews to receive Jesus as their Messiah. To Jews, "Christian" and "Gentile" are often used interchangeably, so Christianity is seen as something essentially Gentile and inappropriate for Jews. Moreover, it tends to remind Jews of harsh persecutions, and persuasions of Jews to leave Judaism and exchange it for Christianity. For these historical and cultural reasons, Stern employs the term "Messianic Jew" to convince that believing in Jesus does not require a person to quit Judaism, but it is a genuinely Jewish choice.⁷

1.1.2. History of Modern Messianic Judaism

There have always been Jews believing in Jesus since first century CE, but the modern Messianic Jewish movement is a relatively new phenomenon in this timespan. From 4th century onwards, the Jesus-believing Jews practising their faith as a form of Judaism has been shunned by both mainstream Christianity and mainstream Judaism. There have been individual Jews who have believed in Jesus, but only in the early nineteenth century did emerge as a movement as a form of Christian outreach to the Jews. The Jews who came to faith then wanted to maintain parts of their Jewish identity while believing in Jesus.⁸

These Jews came to call themselves either Hebrew Christians or Messianic Jews. The Hebrew Christians identified rather as Christians than Jews, members of churches, to which they also wanted to direct their new converts in the ministries of their missionary agencies. But Messianic Jews wanted to continue to live a fully Jewish life within the Jewish community, and they were thus a group distinct from and condemned by Hebrew Christians for too intense commitment to

⁶ Stern 1991, 16–18, 20–24.

⁷ Stern 1991, 18–20, 24–29.

⁸ Harvey 2009, 2–4.

Judaism.⁹ This divide is shown in a writing published by Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA):

We felt it our duty to make it clear that we have nothing to do with this so-called ‘Messianic Judaism’, in any shape or form, nor have we any faith in it.¹⁰

Ironically, HCAA later became known as Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. The change of name and terminology from Hebrew Christian to Messianic Jewish happened in the 1970s, when there was a movement among young Jews called the Jesus movement that brought more Jews into the faith. These new believers refused to assimilate into Gentile Christianity but rather wanted to live out one’s Jewish identity, and they wanted to identify rather as Messianic Jews. The Jewish mission agencies, too, who previously identified their vision as Hebrew Christian, now started to employ terminology such as “Messianic”, “Messianic movement” and “Messianic Jewish”.¹¹

By this shift of terminology from Hebrew Christianity to Messianic Judaism, in the view of D. Thomas Lancaster, “the original term ‘Messianic Judaism’ was hijacked” as it was adopted also by those who did not see the Jewish identity and Torah observance as expressions of covenant fidelity and valuable in its own right. The term became rather “a euphemism for church than a religious expression with its own integrity and identity”. Today many, if not most, Messianic Jews model themselves after liberal forms of Judaism, secular Israeli culture and evangelical and charismatic Christian modes of worship and congregational life, instead of traditional, Orthodox Judaism.¹²

These tensions are explainable by the fact that Messianic Judaism crosses the boundaries of Judaism and Christianity by combining core convictions from both, even though they have an almost 2000-year history of rejecting the other. Christians have often learnt to think that leading a Jewish lifestyle and observing the Jewish law is to be “under the law”, or at best superfluous and redundant. Jews are likely to think that Jesus and the New Testament are in conflict with Jewish monotheism or faithfulness to the Torah and Israel. This conflict can be seen as the core problem and motivator for the development of theology of the currently incipient Messianic Jewish movement. Now I will discuss this challenge in greater detail.

⁹ Rudolph 2013, 26–29.

¹⁰ Hebrew Christian Alliance Quarterly 1 (July/October 1917), 86. Cited in Rudolph 2013, 29.

¹¹ Rudolph 2013, 29–31.

¹² Lancaster 2016a, 15–25.

1.2. Messianic Jewish Theology

The Torah, as interpreted by Jesus and the apostles, forms the basis for Messianic Jewish practice and identity, but it needs intellectual argumentation to convince people of its justifiability. This is the task of theology. In this chapter, I will address topics that are relevant for Messianic Jewish theological reflection in general.

First, there is the growing interest in Judaism in the late twentieth-century trends of New Testament scholarship, which provide exegetical grounds for Messianic Jewish systematic theology. Second, there is a crucial prolegomenal question about the two so-called epistemic priorities of Jewishness and the Messiahship of Jesus and their implications. These pose challenges for coherence but need to be reconciled.

1.2.1. New Testament Scholarship and Messianic Judaism

Towards the end of the twentieth century, interest in the Jewish origins of Christianity began to grow greatly in the academic research on the New Testament. These developments provide scholarly fuel for claims of the authenticity of Messianic Judaism.

Before the emergence of the more recent inquiry into the Jewish roots of Christian faith is the theory of the dichotomy between Greek and Hebrew mindsets. Greek way of thinking is said to seek orderly rules and systems explaining the whole, to which details are forced to conform. In contrast, Hebrew thought proceeds from details into wholes and systems, and, instead of building dogmatic systems, it works by associating scriptural passages with one another and quoting several in a homiletic discourse, giving the use of the Old Testament “a certain ‘comprehensivity’ to the whole presentation and prevents philosophising of an over-subjective kind”.¹³

Shulam also has this dichotomy of things ‘Jewish’ and ‘Greek’ in his writings, and he strongly advocates Jewishness and rejects what he understands as Hellenism. To him, Greek culture is theoretical in regard to study and learning, as opposed to the practicality of Jewish education, and it interprets the Bible allegorically and detaches it from concrete reality (more on this criticism in chapter 2.2.).¹⁴ Greek culture is also a source of “pagan” ideas that were

¹³ Santala 1992, 24–26.

¹⁴ Shulam 2008, 23–24, 116–117; Shulam 2011, 41.

introduced into Christianity after it alienated from its Jewish origins.¹⁵ This way of depicting Hellenism serves not so much as a dispassionate description of first century historical setting as it does as a label for what Messianic Judaism is not. Jewish-Greek dichotomy is a tool for identity formation.

Stanley E. Porter criticizes the way Judaism or Jewishness and Hellenism have been seen as mutually exclusive. He suggests that the Jewish cultural context of antiquity should not be understood in opposition to but within the larger framework of Hellenism. Many features of Greek culture, such as the language, architecture or rationalistic philosophies criticizing the traditional (pagan) religion, were not expressly forbidden in Judaism, but many of the influences were adopted by the Jews.¹⁶

Contemporary New Testament scholarship has focused on the Jewishness of two significant persons of early Christianity: Jesus and Paul. The current research trend on Jesus is named by N. T. Wright as the “Third Quest”, after the two earlier scholarly research programs or “quests” for the historical Jesus, which strove to draw a picture of the person of Jesus through modern scientific means. The first of these “quests” began as a part of Enlightenment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the second in 1950s, after a period of “no quest”. Unlike the two earlier “quests”, the Third Quest began to locate Jesus and the early Christians within the context of contemporary Judaism. However, this is not unique to the Third Quest alone, but has precedents from the earliest phases of the historical inquiry into the historical Jesus, but the Third Quest is taking further steps in the path of discovering Jesus’ Jewishness.¹⁷

The person of Paul and his Jewishness may be even more critical a question for Messianic Judaism than that of Jesus, not because of his preeminence to Jesus, but because of his writings that can be more easily understood as compromising central tenets of Judaism such as the continuing validity of the Torah, or Jews as a unique chosen people of God.

Contemporary Pauline studies have been greatly affected by the advent of the so-called New Perspective on Paul, started by E. P. Sanders with his monograph *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, which “has probably contributed to the change in the view of ancient Judaism more than any other scholarly work of the

¹⁵ Shulam 2011, 10, 39–42.

¹⁶ Porter 2011, 1450–1463.

¹⁷ Porter 2011, 1441–1448.

twentieth century”¹⁸. He questions the idea that Judaism of the first century CE was a religion of works-righteousness and “petty legalism” in which a person earns one’s salvation either by being completely righteous or at least outweighing the evil deeds with good to merit eternal life. Instead, he characterizes Judaism’s “pattern of religion” as covenantal nomism, which involves obedience to the Torah that *presupposes* God’s covenant relationship with Israel, which is based on grace and love. Keeping the commandments were not a way of earning salvation or “getting in” to it, but “staying in” it.¹⁹

According to Sanders, Paul’s pattern of religion differs from the standard covenantal nomism of Judaism. His critique of Judaism was not based on keeping the Torah as such, or attaining salvation by works instead of grace, because Judaism’s covenantal nomism assumed a covenant of grace as its basis. Rather, Sanders says, Paul criticized Judaism because it was not based on being “in Christ”. Paul’s soteriology excluded everyone from salvation who do not have faith in Jesus to be justified. Sanders concluded that Paul’s problem with Judaism was not that it was based on works-righteousness and not grace, but simply because “it is not Christianity”.²⁰

James D. G. Dunn, another representative of the New Perspective and who also coined the term, understands the Pauline expression “works of the law”, not as an individual pursuit of moral excellence, but as the set of Torah laws that distinguished Jews from other nations, such as circumcision and the dietary laws. The curse of the law means the narrow and false understanding of salvation to limit it to those with the Jewish nationality. Jesus died to do away with this curse, he did it to make the covenant relationship available to both Jews and Gentiles.²¹

From the viewpoint of Messianic Jewish theology, New Perspective views are refreshing, but not in regard to Paul, because he is portrayed in obviously supersessionist ways. Paul’s religion, Christianity that is based on “being in Christ”, is something exclusivist and strongly contrasts with Judaism. Dunn’s view on the “works of the law” as an ethnocentric twisting of Israel’s calling does not fit into the framework of Messianic Jewish theology either. What is new in New Perspective is not so much on Paul, but on Judaism, because it is seen not as

¹⁸ Zetterholm 2009, 100.

¹⁹ Sanders 1977, 419–428.

²⁰ Sanders 1977, 543–552.

²¹ Dunn 2005, 121–140.

based on works to attain salvation, but rather a religion based on the covenant of grace, giving it a more favourable description.

Mark D. Nanos, who has named his own stance “Paul within Judaism”, has criticized the New Perspective for that, regardless of its criticism of traditional accounts, it still retains the mutual exclusivity between Paul and Judaism, which Nanos does not see in Paul’s writings. In his view, even the New Perspective researchers are affected by debates and issues of later centuries regarding Paul but overlook the concerns of his and his audiences. Another problem with the New Perspective is that it does not make sense of Paul in claiming that he saw the exclusivism of Judaism with its ethnic distinctives to be the problem and not works-righteousness, while at the same time Paulinism is allegedly not exclusivistic. Paul’s religion, however, also has exclusivistic boundaries of its own, based on faith in Jesus Christ.²²

Nanos portrays Paul as a “good Jew” who is faithful to the tenets of Judaism. In his monograph *The Mystery of the Romans*, he says that while Paul criticizes Jewish ethnocentric exclusivism and the neglect of Israel’s service for universal salvation, his main point was targeted at Gentiles who seemed tempted to think that Israel was rejected. He instructs believers to think and behave in ways that preserves mutual respect and harmony between Jewish and non-Jewish believers and respect for the Jewish community at large. Paul has a “pathos for Israel” and he is a “champion of Israel’s restoration”.²³

With its interest in Judaism, the academia can provide inspiration and academic tools for the development of Messianic Jewish theology. It can strengthen and help argue for the conviction of the importance of the Jewish roots of faith in Jesus, as well as critically re-examine some beliefs and opinions held in the movement, such as the perceived dichotomy and mutual exclusivity of Jewish and Greek mindsets, and develop a more fruitful and nuanced representations of Jewish and Greek traditions, their intermingling and similarities, and their relevance to the identity project of Messianic Judaism today.

1.2.2. Dialectic of Jewish and Messianic Priorities

Rabbi Mark S. Kinzer has suggested guidelines for doing Messianic Jewish theology as a disciplined reflection on several questions raised by Messianic Judaism. This pursuit has three characteristics. Theology must be *coherent*,

²² Nanos 2015, 1–11.

²³ Nanos 1996, 9–16.

meaning that it seeks to rationally reconcile apparent contradictions of the teachings of Scripture. It should also *integrate* the diverse elements of faith, which is to not only try to reconcile them individually, but also to keep in mind the big picture and how these elements should be assembled together to form a particular “shape” of theology and present the material distinguishing between central and more peripheral issues. Theology should also embrace its *dialectical* nature, which means that even though logical coherence and integration is taken seriously, it is also subject to human finitude and limits of rationality, and admit that in all systems there are tensions that are difficult to resolve.²⁴

One key dialectic tension that Kinzer presents is called the “twin epistemic priorities of the continuing election of Israel and the Messiahship of Jesus”²⁵. To be more brief, I will call them “Messianic priority” and “Jewish priority”. They are called epistemic because they “are central *presuppositions* of Messianic Jewish theology, not the products of its reflective process”²⁶. Without these two priorities, theology would not be Messianic Jewish. This dialectic is also the primary reason for theological difficulties in the movement.

What do the Jewish and Messianic priorities actually mean? Jewish priority is the affirmation of the “continuing election of Israel”, meaning that Jews continue to be the chosen people of God. In the narrative of the biblical canon, God chooses and calls Abraham, makes a covenant with him, and promises him a numerous people and the land of Canaan. The rite of circumcision of boys was given as a sign for this covenant. Out of the family of Abraham grows the people of Israel, who are freed from Egypt and given the Torah, God’s law and teaching, at Mount Sinai, that Israel was to keep as the responsibility for the chosen people, and inherit the promised land. Faithfulness to this identity is a great issue for Jews, which makes it an epistemic priority, a theological axiom.

The Messianic priority means belief in the Messiahship of Jesus. Definition and implications for this are sought in the New Testament along with the Hebrew Bible. This priority is shown, to take an example from ecclesiology, in the fact that in several passages the New Testament teaches the inclusion of Gentiles into the community of faith,²⁷ so there arises a question of how the identity of the chosen people should be understood. Because the New Testament is an authority

²⁴ Harvey 2009, 45–47.

²⁵ Harvey 2009, 262.

²⁶ Harvey 2009, 47.

²⁷ For example, Matt 28:19–20, Acts 15, Rom 9:26, Eph 2:11–22 and Gal 3:27–29.

for Messianic Judaism, and because the Gentile participation in the people of God is so widely attested in its canon, it must also be a theological axiom. The dialectic between the chosenness of Israel and the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel calls for theological reflection on the implications of these convictions when they are applied without neglecting or discrediting either priority.

The tension between the Jewish and Messianic priorities have created a wide spectrum of different versions of Messianic Jewish theology. Instead of a binary distinction, like that between Hebrew Christianity and Messianic Judaism, Harvey presents a typology of eight types or “streams” of thought, and thus draws a “map” of the diverse theological landscape of early 21st century Messianic Jewish theology. These types are numbered from 1–8, presented with certain influential theologians to exemplify each of these types. Types closest to number 1 represents the minimal adoption of Jewishness and closest relation to traditional (Protestant) Christian theology, and types toward the other end identify more with traditional Judaism.²⁸

Types 1–4 represent very much Protestant Christian theologies, ranging from Calvinist Reform theology to modern evangelicalism and charismatic movement. They embrace the Jewish identity at least on a cultural level, but they have varying theological opinions of the continuing validity of the biblical commandments of the Torah. Some consider them obsolete while others embrace them, some even as binding for Jews. Common for these types, though, is to reject the status of the Rabbinic Jewish tradition as binding or defining Jewish identity.²⁹

Types 5–8 see the Torah in a much more positive light, and Rabbinic tradition as more or less important for Messianic Jews. Some adopt the Rabbinic tradition in a critical, non-Orthodox Jewish manner, perhaps closer to Conservative Judaism, while others wish to retain the overall framework of Orthodox Judaism. Type 8 goes so far as to put the faithfulness to Torah observance and Rabbinic rulings on the same line with faith in Jesus the Messiah, and thus representing the most radically Jewish version of Judaism that still believes that Jesus is the Messiah.³⁰

Shulam is labeled type 7, titled “Rabbinic Halacha in the Light of the New Testament”, with the call for Messianic application (*halakhah*) of the Torah without the total adoption of Orthodox Jewish Rabbinic authority. He rejects, at

²⁸ Harvey 2009, 265–267.

²⁹ Harvey 2009, 267–271.

³⁰ Harvey 2009, 271–277.

least for Jewish believers, the culture of modern Christian evangelicalism,³¹ which has greatly influenced the Messianic Jewish movement in Israel and elsewhere, and favours instead the heritage of traditional Rabbinic Judaism as the interpretative and cultural framework of his faith.

1.2.3. Future Prospects

Harvey has done a pioneering work to map out the spectrum of Messianic Jewish theology. He admits, though, that this project is far from complete. Only a selection of doctrines – doctrine of God, doctrine of Torah, and eschatology – are covered. Harvey makes proposals for several topics of future studies on Messianic Jewish theology. Among those are topics that this thesis will address: ecclesiology and the election of Israel, and Messianic Jewish identity.³²

Harvey also makes an important point about doing ecclesiology:

The 'epistemic priority' of Israel needs to be understood in the light of the Messiahship of Yeshua [Jesus], and the relationship between the Church and Israel needs to be understood in a post-supersessionist way that still sees a place for Messianic Jews. For [Messianic Jewish theology], this affirmation needs to be properly aligned with an adequate soteriology in order to correctly conceive the relationship between Israel and the Church.³³

In addition to the need of a "post-supersessionist way" of understanding the relationship of Israel and the Church, Harvey also correctly points out the need for "an adequate soteriology", because matters of salvation, redemption and restoration are tightly connected to the very purpose of the people of God. Now I will zoom into the ecclesiological questions of Messianic Judaism.

1.3. Ecclesiology and Messianic Judaism

Ecclesiology is the study or the doctrine of the church, derived from the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), which means 'assembly'. Before the New Testament, the word was already used by the translators of the Septuagint to refer to the people of Israel that assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive their covenant with God "on the day of the assembly" (Deut 4:10, NETS).³⁴ Therefore,

³¹ On the other hand, he writes on his blog: "I am not opposed to my Gentile brothers having their own identity, their own culture, and a style of worship that differs from mine, and even that they be Pentecostals, Lutherans, Baptists, or Afro-Americans. But as for me, the most important thing is the fact that the first congregation in Jerusalem, as described in the pages of the New Covenant, was a Messianic Jewish congregation, which was 100% faithful to our Lord Yeshua and 100% faithful to the Torah of Israel." <http://www.netivyah.org/article/first-century-jewish-identity-as-a-model/> (accessed 13th March 2017)

³² Harvey 2009, 277–284.

³³ Harvey 2009, 280.

³⁴ For example, Deut 4:10, 9:10 and 18:16.

ecclesiology could also be understood as the study of Israel, or more comprehensively, the study of the people of God.

Among the greatest concerns in Messianic Jewish ecclesiology is the issue of supersessionism, or replacement theology. Basically, supersessionism refers to the idea that the unique role of the ethnic people of Israel has come to its end at the coming of Jesus, when it is at some point replaced by the Christian Church, who now comprise the non-Jewish "spiritual" Israel.

R. Kendall Soulen has taken the definition of supersessionism a little further in the light of what he calls canonical narrative. It means that different theologies build the big picture of the Bible's narrative in different ways, and many of these models do not regard Israel as a core element in the canonical narrative after the coming of Christ. Soulen describes three different kinds of supersessionism. One is *structural supersessionism*, where the canonical narrative is written in an "Israel-forgetful" way. The nation of Israel is simply ignored, and the story of creation, fall and redemption are told by skipping the topic of Israel altogether. Another one is *economic supersessionism*, where Israel and everything characteristic of Israel's life is designed to eventually become obsolete from the very beginning of their institution. Thirdly, there is *punitive supersessionism*, which is the view that Israel is rejected as God's people, even cursed, because of their sins and disobedience to the Torah, and rejection of their Messiah.³⁵

With Soulen's categories in mind, we can see that some, especially punitive, varieties of supersessionism can quite naturally breed anti-Semitism. We can also see, nevertheless, that this is not the case in all forms of supersessionism. Unlike punitive, economic supersessionism is a theological construct without necessary hostile attitudes towards the Jews. What is necessary is a theological disagreement over religious matters. The same is largely true with structural supersessionism as well, accompanied with a Christian indifference or ignorance about their and their Bible's connections to the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism partially overlaps with the field of supersessionist thought, but is not a necessary part of all forms of supersessionism.

The core of the problem of supersessionism is its rejection of Jewish priority, and for Messianic Jewish theology to have credibility, it needs to provide adequate refutations of supersessionism as well as adequate alternative

³⁵ Soulen 2013, 282–290.

ecclesiologies. Next, I will explore some ecclesiologies proposed in discussions surrounding Mark S. Kinzer's Bilateral ecclesiology.

1.3.1. Mark S. Kinzer: Bilateral Ecclesiology

In 2005, Mark S. Kinzer published a book named *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People*, where he presents his vision for Messianic Jewish ecclesiology. The identity of the Christian Church is founded on the convictions that Jesus is (1) the mediator of "all of God's creative, revelatory, reconciling and redemptive activity" and (2) the way for the Church to participate in Israel's covenantal privileges. Christians have also become, in decades following the Holocaust, increasingly reluctant to accept the traditional supersessionist notions. But because the majority of Jews have rejected Jesus, repudiation of supersessionism is difficult to fit into the scheme of the two central convictions mentioned above. Kinzer introduces his idea of postmissionary Messianic Judaism as the solution to this problem.³⁶

Kinzer describes postmissionary Messianic Judaism as a form of Messianic Judaism that keeps the Torah and honours the Jewish religious tradition as a matter of "covenant fidelity rather than missionary expediency". This means that Messianic Jews should not merely use Jewish heritage as a tool to convert Jews into Christianity. Rather, Messianic Jews are to express their Jewish identity in its own right, and as members of the wider Jewish community. Messianic Jewish faithfulness to the Torah, and participation in the Jewish community, form the basis for its relationship with the Church, the multiethnic, multinational extension of Israel that has its own identity distinct from Jews.³⁷

In other words, Messianic Jews should not live as Jews merely to persuade other Jews to accept Christianity with a Jewish flavour. Jewish identity is of intrinsic, not merely instrumental value. Postmissionary Messianic Judaism, then, is not a form of contextualization or acculturation of Christianity into a foreign culture. Instead, postmissionary Messianic Judaism is the *restoration* of the lost heritage of Jewish believers that belonged to the framework of apostolic faith.

Kinzer calls his ecclesiological model "bilateral ecclesiology in solidarity with Israel". It is bilateral, because the ekklesia is composed of Jewish and Gentile segments or ekklesias. The Jewish ekklesia should remain and live as Israel, as a part of the wider Jewish community. The Gentile ekklesia is the

³⁶ Kinzer 2005, 12–13.

³⁷ Kinzer 2005, 13–16.

transnational extension of Israel that should not be forced or persuaded to become Jewish. Solidarity with Israel, instead of disdain or indifference, is a result of the Messianic Jews' identification with the Jewish community as a whole, and Gentile believers sharing the common, unifying faith with their Jewish brothers and sisters. Gentile believers have a "share in Israel's riches" and "can legitimately identify with Israel's history and destiny".³⁸

As the outworking of his ecclesiological vision, Kinzer suggests three steps for the Christian churches. First, the churches should reinforce respect for Jewish people, Judaism and Jewish tradition among Christians. Second, churches must both reject supersessionism and take seriously the implications the rejection entails, that is, the covenantal relationship of Israel with God, the validity of Torah and Jewish religious tradition. This also means for Kinzer that participation for Jews in Gentile Christian churches, while a widespread reality, is not the ideal for believing Jews, and this should be taken into account by churches who have Jewish members to help them fulfill their obligations as Jews. Third, churches should enter into dialogue and actively engage with the Messianic Jewish movement and encourage it to develop towards the postmissionary direction.³⁹

When the Jewish *ekklesia* is established, appreciation of Jesus' Jewishness becomes more natural. The Gentile *ekklesia* has a certain advantages of this. One is to overcome dualism. The bodily and physical is often pitted against the spiritual. Judaism does not make such a strong dichotomy, and the Jewish *ekklesia* can help Gentiles to embrace the full implications of Incarnation by overcoming dualism. Another one is the Jewish reading of Scripture. Jewish-Gentile dialogue within the *ekklesia* allows the reading of the Bible to be renewed in a positive way, and helps respond to its teaching. The restoration of Jewish *ekklesia* in a postmissionary fashion that works in cooperation with the transnational Gentile segment gives a picture of reconciliation that the church is called to realize in the whole world.⁴⁰

Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology that has two distinct segments of *ekklesia* has been responded to in different ways. I will present two responses to Kinzer's theology, one by a Roman Catholic theologian Matthew Levering, and another by a Gentile theologian affiliated with Messianic Judaism, D. Thomas Lancaster.

³⁸ Kinzer 2005, 151–153, 177.

³⁹ Kinzer 2005, 308–309.

⁴⁰ Kinzer 2005, 303–307.

1.3.2. Rejecting Kinzer: Fulfillment Theology

In the January 2009 issue of *First Things* magazine, Mark Kinzer and Matthew Levering exchange thoughts about the Roman Catholic theological views on Israel, the Jews and Judaism. This dialogue is an interesting and enlightening example of the tension that Messianic Jewish perspectives have with theologies that have very different ideas about what it means that Jesus fulfills the Torah.

First, Kinzer presents criticism of *Lumen Gentium*'s presentation of Israel as a mere "foreshadowing", "preparation" and "figure" of the Church, and its too strong emphasis on what Kinzer understands as discontinuity of the Jewish identity in the new covenant people, the Church. He suggests a reconsideration of the Jewishness of Jesus who kept the Torah as a faithful Jew. He also challenges to view the Church not as a completely new and different reality from Israel, but rather as an eschatologically renewed Israel that is extended to include Gentiles also. Though most Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, their participation in the people of God points toward accepting Jesus, not as the founder of a new religion or a new people of God to replace Israel, but as the foundation of their covenantal fidelity of the same, though renewed, people of Israel. This means the continuity instead of discontinuity of the Jewish identity. In contrast with this, when Gentiles accept the faith in Jesus, are initiated to the people of Israel as a group distinct from Jews.⁴¹

Levering sees Kinzer's ecclesiology as problematic for two reasons. First, he questions Kinzer's terminology of continuity and discontinuity, and prefers to understand Jesus in terms of fulfillment. This means that Jesus fulfills the Torah by observing it perfectly, and in his redemptive work on the cross and in resurrection he "reconfigures Israel around himself". To Levering, Jesus is the "eschatological center of history", not merely a player in the field among others, or another Moses. Second, he criticizes Kinzer's theology of Jewish identity for its distinction between two different people groups, Jews and Gentiles. He thinks that this leads to two unequal classes in the Church, Jews being better, more privileged and closer to Jesus than Gentiles. Levering sees it so because if participation in Jesus' fulfillment of the Torah requires observing the Torah as a Jew, then Gentiles cannot participate in the fulfillment of the Torah the same way as Jews. They should either become Torah-observant Jews or not have full fellowship with Jesus. He says that in order for both Jews and Gentiles to be

⁴¹ Kinzer & Levering 2009, 43–47.

equal, the Torah must be understood to be “fulfilled eucharistically”. That is to say, by participating in the Eucharist meal, all believers participate in the fulfillment of the Torah by Jesus and thus have equal access to God.⁴²

This dialogue reveals an example of differences between Messianic Jewish and traditional Christian theologies on the Torah, Israel and the work of Christ. The fulfillment model resolves the tension between Jewish and Messianic priorities by having the Messianic priority absorb the Jewish one altogether. Because Christ fulfills the Torah and “reconfigures Israel around himself” and stands at the center of history, the Jewish aspects of faith are redefined in the person of Christ. Therefore through participation in the Eucharist all believers have a share in the Torah because it is participation in Christ’s perfect Torah observance.

1.3.3. Partially Accepting Kinzer: Radial Proleptic Ecclesiology

D. Thomas Lancaster has a much more sympathetic reaction to Kinzer’s ecclesiology than Levering, for his criticism of Kinzer stems from within Messianic Judaism. He suggests an “alteration”, instead of rejection, of Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology. Lancaster’s intention is to offer an ecclesiological model for the vision of “Messianic Judaism for All Nations” that includes both Jews and Gentiles in the same community while at the same time maintaining their distinct identities.⁴³

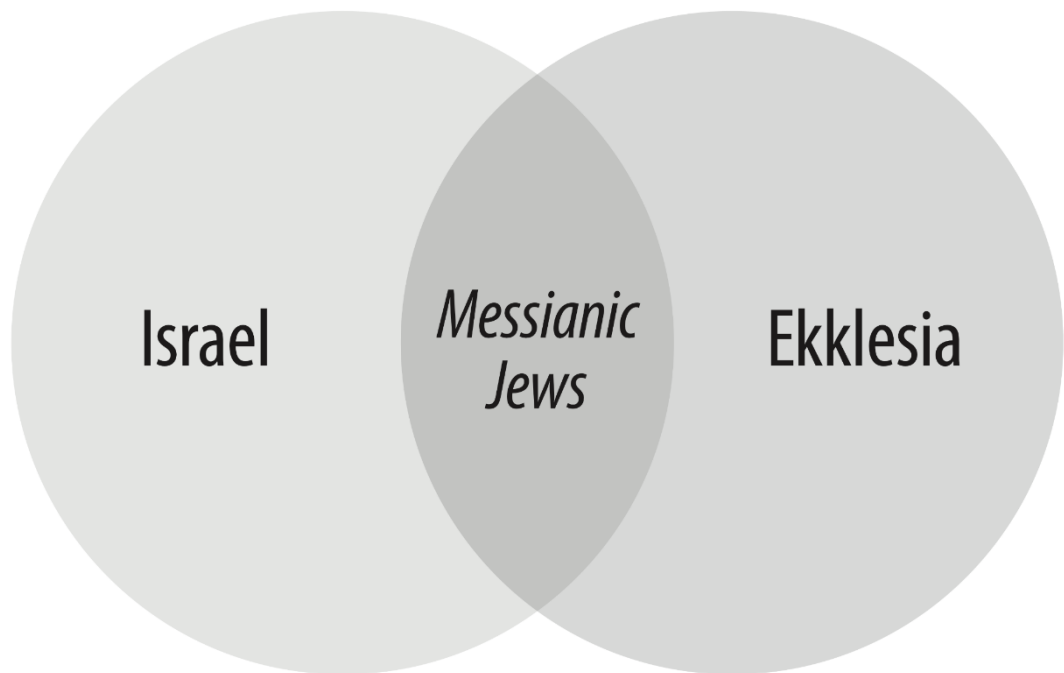
Lancaster draws a diagram (shown below in Figure 1) to visualize Kinzer’s model. It consists of two partially overlapping circles representing Israel (or the Jews) and the Ekklesia (or Church/Gentile Christians). These are the two people groups constituting the people of God, and the overlapping area represents the Messianic Jews, who have a dual membership in both groups. They are part of both the Jesus-believing Ekklesia and the Jewish people. This leads to two distinct religious expressions of the Messianic faith: Messianic Jews observe the Torah and Jewish lifestyle in the synagogue, and Gentile Christians practise conventional forms of Christianity.⁴⁴

⁴² Kinzer & Levering 2009, 47–49.

⁴³ Lancaster 2016b, 34.

⁴⁴ Lancaster 2016b, 35–38.

Figure 1: Bilateral Ecclesiology⁴⁵



Lancaster says – with some irony perhaps – that there are advantages to this model. One is sociological, meaning that if Messianic Jews had congregations of their own, separate from Gentile churches, then the Jewish identity would be better preserved within the Jesus faith than in churches where the Jews would eventually be assimilated into the Gentile majority if there are no boundaries between Jews and Gentiles. Another one is a political advantage, because if Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians congregated in different communities, then Messianic Judaism would not threaten the status quo of the conventional Christian theology and practice, and pose only the challenge of accepting the value of Messianic Judaism *for Jewish believers*.⁴⁶

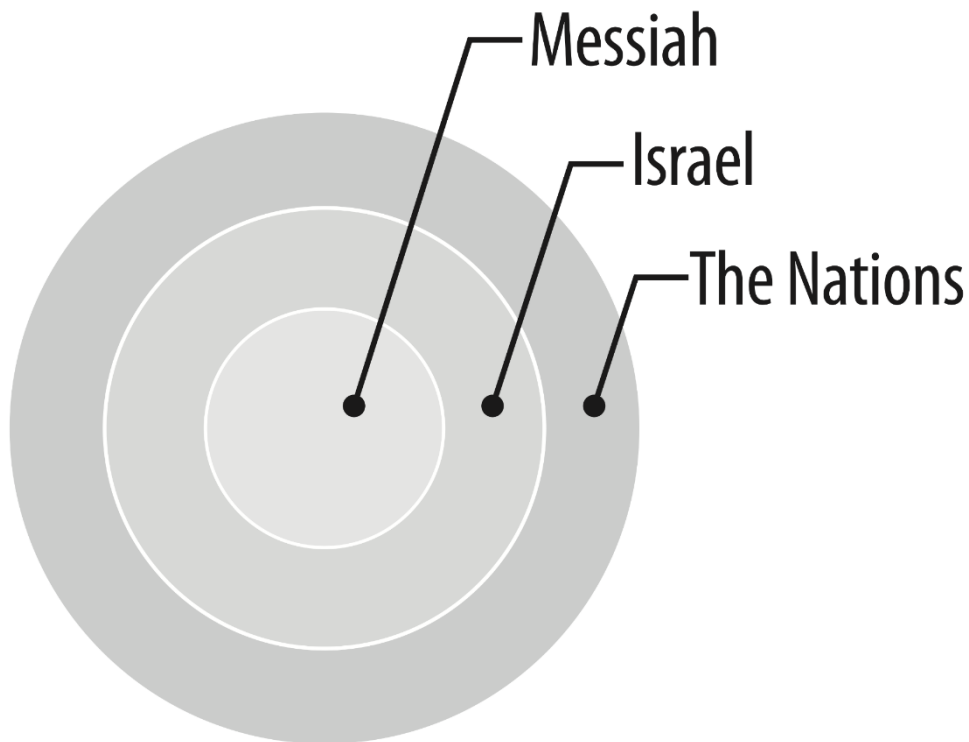
However, bilateral ecclesiology does not satisfy Lancaster. In his view, the apostles did not see themselves as a "subset" of Israel and a "subset" of Christians, as if they were on the overlapping area of two circles. Rather, they saw themselves at the center of Israel. Lancaster envisions the people of God to have one center, Messiah, from which the domain of the King of the Jews radiates to Israel and ultimately to all the nations of the world. This is visualized "as a bull's-eye composed of concentric circles", as shown in Figure 2.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lancaster 2016b, 37.

⁴⁶ Lancaster 2016b, 40.

⁴⁷ Lancaster 2016b, 38–39.

Figure 2: Radial Ecclesiology⁴⁸



In this way, Lancaster's model is radial ecclesiology, because all its segments are like a radiation from the core, the Messiah. But it also "provides a proleptic view of the ekklesia in that it models itself on the universalism of the kingdom". Lancaster means by prolepsis the practise of Messianic Judaism by both Jews and Gentiles now in *anticipation* of the future era when the people of Israel will be restored to their land, where the Messiah will rule over the whole world, and everyone will practise the same religion. However, this does not mean that Gentiles become Jews or vice versa, but that, as members of the same community, Jews and Gentiles are assigned their respective, distinct roles and identities.⁴⁹ Hence, it is radial proleptic ecclesiology, a theology of expectation of the future era when all the people in the world will be united under the rule of Messiah, and have the same unifying religion: Messianic Judaism.

The radial model is very unlike that of Kinzer, which seeks primarily to return the Jews to their national covenant faithfulness by promoting Jewish lifestyle in traditional Jewish community as the ideal for Messianic Jews, while Christians should merely acknowledge this need but first and foremost continue their life of faith in conventional forms of Christianity. Though this is by no means without consequences, Lancaster's model requires radical change for all

⁴⁸ Lancaster 2016b, 39.

⁴⁹ Lancaster 2016b, 39, 41–42.

believers in Jesus, a complete restructuring of the whole face of both Christianity and Judaism.

Radial ecclesiology is an attempt to reconcile the Jewish priority of distinct Jewish identity and at the same time affirm the Messianic priority of the unity of all believers regardless of ethnic or cultural background. Going even beyond bilateral ecclesiology, it even envisions Messianic Judaism as a faith that would incorporate Jewish and Gentile believer lifestyles in the very same local communities, not synagogues and Gentile churches as separate communities with the same Messiah. Moreover, Lancaster is not as pluralistic in regards to the forms of Christianity as Kinzer, for he sees the eschatological future so that Messianic Judaism is the only religion in the whole world.

1.3.4. Adequate Soteriology – Evaluation of the Models

In the discussions above, I have done some mapping of the landscape regarding Messianic Jewish ecclesiology, where the Messianic and Jewish priorities are put together in varying ways. Now I will evaluate how they address the issue of salvation in the context of ecclesiology.

Levering takes soteriology into account quite extensively. He relates all aspects of Israel to the person of Jesus who, observing the Torah completely throughout his life all the way to crucifixion, fulfills it and its merit is available to Christians who participate in the Eucharist. Soteriology is well described, but Levering's categories of Torah being fulfilled "eucharistically" or Israel "reconfigured around" Christ are theological categories that are likely to be rejected in Messianic Jewish theologies as manipulations of Scripture. This is related to influential epistemological or hermeneutical convictions in Messianic Judaism that are shared by Shulam, as we will see in the analysis on this subject in chapter 2.2.

Kinzer has managed to create a model that gives space for Messianic Jews to be genuinely Jewish by separating Jewish and Gentile believers into two interconnected but independent communities. The problem of supersessionism is solved, and his model benefits the religious dialogue between Jews and Christians. Ecclesiology is connected to soteriology so that the reconciliation of Jews and Christians embodies the message of reconciliation that the church wants to work for all over the world. Assisting in this mission, the restored Jewish ekklesia can help understand the Scriptures from the perspective of a religious

tradition in which they were written, thus better enabling it to respond to its message.

The radial ecclesiology of Lancaster exhibits an anticipation of the Messianic Age when the Messiah has subjected everyone under his rule, and every person on earth practices Messianic Judaism in accordance with that rule. Each takes up roles that correspond to one's identity as a Jew or Gentile. The proleptic aspect of radial ecclesiology means that the future is not merely something that is expected to come real at some time, but it is actively lived out at the present moment. It communicates more clearly the implications of Messianic Judaism and the relevance of Israel's election for Gentile believers as well, because the ideal is that because both share the same faith, it is logical to share the same communal space to express that unity. It is, then, more natural for Gentiles to participate in the Jewish practice, though not because of obligation, but out of solidarity with the people from whom their Saviour has come.

Lancaster has the most clear emphasis on the salvation as a matter of the realized kingdom and kingly rule of God, under which everything and everyone else is subjected. The most famous representative of this "gospel of the kingdom" perspective is George Eldon Ladd⁵⁰, but is also taught by N. T. Wright⁵¹ and Scot McKnight⁵², to name a few. This connects quite naturally the aspects of ecclesiology and soteriology: Israel's society founded on the Torah forms the foundation for God's kingdom, to which Gentiles have access through Messiah's global kingship.

Though Shulam does not employ the same terminology as Lancaster, his ecclesiology represents a kind of radial ecclesiology, where Gentiles do not form a separate body of believers to worship side-by-side with the Jewish ekklesia. Rather, Gentiles join the "commonwealth of Israel" (Eph 2:12) along with the Jews. His ecclesiology also includes a clear soteriological element, as we will see in the following chapters.

2. Ecclesiology of Roots

In this chapter, I will analyze the basic theological concept of roots that Shulam uses, and upon which he builds his ecclesiology. Roots are the connection to the source and foundation of human existence, and to be rooted is to have both the

⁵⁰ Ladd 1993, 54–67.

⁵¹ Wright 1996.198–229.

⁵² McKnight 2011.

correct understanding of life and faith, and the right conduct springing from that understanding. Basing one's faith and life on the Bible as the Word of God instead of "trusting in men" is crucial for identity and roots in Shulam's theological paradigm. Epistemologically, the reality the Bible refers to is understood in indexical and empirical terms, instead of being part of a world of ideas and allegories.

2.1. Planted in the House of the Lord

Shulam cites Psalm 92:12–15 as the inspiration for the title of his book *Planted in the House of the Lord*, and his idea of roots:⁵³

The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

From here, Shulam takes the idea of spiritual health and vitality that is based on being rooted in the metaphorical courts of the Jerusalem Temple. This vitality is synonymous with the light of monotheism, and stands in contrast with idolatry that is compared to darkness and infertile desert. In choosing the people of Israel, God planted them in his Temple, and "those from the nations" (that is, non-Jews or Gentiles) who believe in Jesus are, to use the Pauline language of Romans 11, "grafted in to the olive tree of Israel" and they "also have a firmly rooted foundation in the house of God".⁵⁴

However, Shulam does not believe that this spiritual vitality will automatically come true if one is a Jew or believes in Jesus. It is possible to "forget" or even be "cut off" from one's roots due to a misunderstanding of the identity of the people of God. Misunderstanding has brought about a confusion that concerns the identity of God as well as the identities of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, as well as the identity of the main body of Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus.⁵⁵

To Shulam, this confusion is not only a theoretical or theological problem, but has dramatic, practical consequences in the area of spirituality to those who were planted in the House of the Lord. "Because of this confusion, they are cut off

⁵³ Shulam 2011, 13. Henceforth, *Planted* for short.

⁵⁴ Shulam 2011, 13.

⁵⁵ Shulam 2011, 11–12.

from their roots, and their faith withers away in the storms and droughts of life.”⁵⁶ So roots have soteriological significance. They are the pipeline of spiritual life, and cutting them off means spiritual death.

2.1.1. Word of God versus Traditions of Men

Shulam strongly contrasts the Bible as the Word of God with “human traditions”. He refers to Jeremiah 17:5–9 where it says that those who trust in men are cursed and those who trust in God are blessed. Imagery of flourishing and withering greenery is employed in this passage as well. One of the prerequisites for being properly rooted in faith is the study of the Bible, as opposed to believing people without first critically examining their teachings with the Bible.⁵⁷

It is noteworthy that the criticism of “human traditions” is aimed primarily against Christian tradition. Rabbinic tradition, though Shulam does not accept it as totally authoritative,⁵⁸ receives much less criticism, and one whole chapter in his *Planted* is devoted to defend the Pharisees against the notion that their religion is totally evil and that they are complete hypocrites. In this chapter of the book, Shulam wants to show that Jesus had much in common with the Pharisees as well, such as belief in the resurrection and the angels, and that religious disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees were internal disputes within Judaism. The fact that Jesus says in Matthew 23:2–3 that Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses is a source of reflection for Shulam to seriously consider the significance of Rabbinic Jewish tradition for Messianic Judaism today.⁵⁹

Shulam does not support a strict *sola scriptura* principle. He actually denies it is possible at all to adhere to this principle, because whenever a person reads the Bible he must also interpret it. But on what basis does Shulam reject one trajectory of tradition (Christian) and at the same time gives much weight to the other (Rabbinic Judaism)? The reason lies at Shulam’s understanding of Romans 3:1. The Bible was entrusted to the Jewish people, who received and preserved it, and their culture is the framework that gives the proper context for understanding the meaning of the texts. Moreover, even the post-biblical Rabbinic tradition has relevance for giving contextual perspective on the basis of the seat of Moses in Matthew 23:2–3.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Shulam 2011, 13.

⁵⁷ Shulam 2011, 28–31.

⁵⁸ Shulam 2008, 80, 100–101.

⁵⁹ Shulam 2011, 69–103.

⁶⁰ Shulam 2008, 74–78.

The seat of Moses reminds one of Exodus 18:13–27 that tells about Moses judging the people and Jethro’s advice to delegate the smaller matters of the Torah to leaders of smaller groups of people. It also seems to echo the commandment to appoint judges and officers to all the cities of the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 16:18–20. The Torah, then, is to be applied communally to the people of God, and there is a special position for which a person is appointed to interpret the Torah. It is this institution to which the Pharisees appropriated their notions of the Oral Torah. In the Mishnah, which is said by scholars to be compiled by the end of the second century CE, there is a tractate called the *Pirkei Avot* or the Sayings of the Fathers, an ethical section of the oral tradition of the early rabbis. It begins with these words:

Moses received Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets delivered it to the Men of the Great Synagogue. These said three things; Be deliberate in judging, and raise up many disciples, and make a hedge for the Torah.⁶¹

There is a dilemma as to whether Jesus teaches to obey or to reject the authority of this chain of tradition, and to what extent. In many passages, he criticizes harshly the teaching of the Pharisees. In the discourse on hand-washing and eating bread, he says that people nullify the commandment of God and serve him in vain by keeping traditions of men (Matt 15:7–9). Jesus tells his disciples to beware of the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:1–12). Probably the most critical discourse toward the Pharisees is the parable of the vineyard tenants (Matt 21:33–46), which teaches that because the Pharisees and high priests have persecuted righteous prophets and the Messiah, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” (v. 43). Being aware of all these teachings, Jesus’ words “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you” (Matt 23:2–3) pose a difficulty.

There have been numerous interpretations of Matt 23:2–3. Origen taught that by “scribes and Pharisees” on the “seat of Moses” Jesus means the ecclesiastical authorities, though the majority of the early church teachers instead limited the scope of what is meant by “whatever they tell you”. “Whatever” refers to the “ethical law” that still applies and not the “ritual law”, or “everything that is worthy of the seat of Moses”. Another kind of interpretation is that Jesus gave this

⁶¹ Mishnah, m.Avot 1:1. Men of the Great Synagogue are contemporaries of Ezra, from whom the tradition continued from generation to generation in the Second Temple era.

charge for his own time only, and ceased to apply when the law was abolished on the cross. From the perspective of redaction criticism, the text is a collection of Jesus' saying made into a polemic with the late first-century Pharisaic authorities. Rhetorical analysis has it that the imperative to observe everything is used as a rhetorical concession to serve the main thrust of the text, that is, the criticism of what the scribes and Pharisees *do*. What is the main focus of the text, and what really matters for Matthew, are the deeds and practice, and what a person says is of lesser importance.⁶²

Origen's allegorization did not have wide acceptance, but also the limitation of "whatever they tell you" is also a little questionable. In the light of the rest of the teachings of Jesus, and the rest of Matthew 23 for that matter, 23:2–3 is difficult to take at face value, but assuming an irony in an ancient written text is also risky, for we no longer have the non-verbal cues that accompanied the saying.

Shulam's view distinguishes in Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees, those who criticize them from outside and those who do so from inside the religious Jewish circles. Shulam sees Jesus among the insiders. He also makes a distinction between beliefs and behaviour of the Pharisees, the former of which Jesus largely agreed with while starkly rejected the latter. The problem with the Pharisees was not the institution of the seat of Moses or the idea of traditions or the Oral Torah, but the unethical and hypocritical conduct that did not regard the most important commandments of the Torah. With this hypocritical behaviour they sought to win respect among men. Shulam teaches that this issue of hypocrisy is not exclusive to Pharisees or Rabbinic Judaism, but is a universal human problem.⁶³

Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition is made of "human traditions", for otherwise Jesus would not criticize them, but they are not based on completely human grounds, because the "seat of Moses" that the Pharisees hold is instituted by God. It is the Bible as the Word of God that Shulam believes is the authoritative source of spiritual life, but it is not something that is interpreted apart from *any* tradition. The idea of tradition itself is not an error, but it is primarily – if not solely – the Rabbinic Jewish religious tradition that is the logical extension of the biblical text and gives the overall, though not infallible, interpretative framework for

⁶² Luz 2005, 100–101.

⁶³ Shulam 2011, 83–85.

interpreting the Bible. Within this context, Shulam believes, the Bible becomes more understandable and better enlivens the person in his relationship with God.

The implication of this belief is the need for Christians and Messianic Jews to get acquainted with the texts and spirituality of traditional Judaism. Yet, not only that of Jesus' time, but also Judaism as a living tradition as it is practised today. This because the Jews continue to have the position and mission to preserve and live out the Torah that God gave them. This is the function of the seat of Moses, and Jesus affirming its validity calls for Christians to both familiarize with the Jewish texts as well as come into more extensive contact with the Jewish community for dialogue and learning. This is needed to improve the relations of Jews and Christians as well as Christians' own self-understanding. Since the seat of Moses is something Jesus commanded his disciples to obey – however, rejecting the hypocrisy of the personal lives of individual teachers – Rabbinic tradition seems to become not only a heritage of Jews but also of Christians and the Church. The ramifications and details of this theology are further expounded in chapter 4.

2.2. Allegorization as a Denial of Roots

One “human tradition” that Shulam criticizes and which he sees as a dire threat to the believer's rootedness, is allegorical interpretation. In his view, it is a source of serious errors, an approach that takes the Scripture out of its context, and makes it like an empty cup that the interpreter fills with whatever meanings he wishes.⁶⁴

According to Shulam's narration of early church history, Christianity adopted allegorical interpretation when it was alienated from its Jewish roots by the fourth century CE. Christians distanced themselves from Judaism because of the persecutions of Jews, and they turned toward Rome for favour. This created a mental distance from the land and the people of Israel, and Jerusalem, which was devastated by Emperor Hadrian in about 135 AD. Another reason for the alienation was a supersessionist type of thinking as they interpreted the Bible. For example, references to Israel were reinterpreted spiritually and allegorically as references to Christians and the Church as the “Spiritual Israel”, and thus the early Christian theologians inserted their own bias to deny the literal meaning of Scripture.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Shulam 2008, 23–24.

⁶⁵ Shulam 2011, 39–40.

Allegorization is a denial of roots in two respects. In general, it creates an artificial reality that gives way to both a total hermeneutical arbitrariness and alienation of the faith and the Bible from physical, concrete human reality and its needs. More specifically, allegorical interpretation leads the interpreter to deny the continuing status of the physical people of Israel as the chosen people and replaces it with a “spiritualized” substitute for Jews, the Christians.⁶⁶

Shulam’s criticism is not unique in Messianic Judaism. John Dulin, an anthropologist who has done ethnographic research on Messianic Jewish congregations in San Diego, California, notes that in Messianic Judaism people tend to adopt what he calls a fundamentalist model of reality which contrasts with the premodern model of interpreting the sacred text. Premodern hermeneutics is characterized by figural interpretation that understands biblical events as parts and reflections of a divine, transcendental plan, with more emphasis on the figures of divine realities and their fulfillment in Jesus, and less on their connection to the earthly, historical realities. In contrast, the fundamentalist model of reality, which is endorsed by dispensationalist theologians, is modernist in the sense that it seeks to demonstrate the connections of biblical events and prophecies to concrete reality of historical events. In this way, the fundamentalist approach to biblical interpretation, in the vein of and response to modern scholarship, is committed to both the supernatural character of the biblical revelation and scientific approach to reality.⁶⁷

This modernist epistemology is foundational for the “evaluative grammar of authenticity”, by which Messianic Jews argue for the authenticity of their faith. Dulin uses Charles Peirce’s term *index* to describe authenticity as something that exists as a “natural condition of the unmanipulated real”, as opposed to “symbolic manipulations” and something “manufactured”.⁶⁸

Jews and the founding of the state of Israel are major indexes to the fulfillment of biblical prophecies about the return of Jews to the Promised Land. When Jerusalem came under Jewish control in the Six Day War in 1967, it was seen as a major event toward the culmination of God’s redemptive plans for Israel and, ultimately, for the whole world. Dulin refers to a rabbi who said that the Christian hope for the second coming of Jesus is tied to Jews “welcoming him

⁶⁶ Shulam 2011, 41–42.

⁶⁷ Dulin 2013, 37–39.

⁶⁸ Dulin 2013, 35–37.

back”. Messianic Jews, being believers in Jesus, see themselves as “first fruits” that anticipate the full restoration of the Jewish nation.⁶⁹

Dulin’s analysis of these indexical underpinnings of Messianic Jewish theology sheds much light on Shulam’s criticism of allegorization. Allegory is something manufactured by arbitrary interpretative maneuvers, through which the identity of Israel as the chosen people can be reconstrued as a reference to Christians, the “spiritual Israel”. It is a theological superstructure that obscures the natural, indexical reality of the physical, concrete people of Israel, the Jews. This problem is the origin of supersessionism.

What Shulam rejects as allegorization resembles premodern figural interpretation described by Dulin, in which references to the land and the people of Israel with all their customs and laws are treated as figures of Christ or the Church but without a direct effect on the praxis after they are fulfilled in Christ. In Matthew Levering’s theology (examined in chapter 1.3.2.), many of the laws of Torah have no practical application after the resurrection of Christ because believers participate “eucharistically” in Christ’s work that fulfills the Torah. Levering explains that Christ is the eschatological center of history and because of this the Bible is to be interpreted through the lens of the person of Christ. Therefore his theology is a representative of the figural approach to the Bible. Commenting on Gal 5:14⁷⁰, Le Cornu and Shulam criticize such fulfillment theologies:

The Christian casuistry countenanced in the distinction between “doing” the Torah – which Paul ostensibly never requires from his readers – and its “fulfilling,” of which he does speak, yet only while “describing its results” and never in “prescribing Christian conduct” – is ironically misplaced here. While such nuances should be characteristic of exegesis of the New Testament, properly recognized as Jewish text, they here rather appear to derive from an indisposition to the Torah – an attitude which Paul himself fails to manifest but which Christians of all colours intractably continue to ascribe to him⁷¹

The fulfillment of the Torah is understood very differently from Levering’s fulfillment model. In Le Cornu and Shulam’s opinion, it means that the Messiah “is the one in and through whom the command of love is observable”. Believers participate in Jesus’ faithfulness, and the work of the Holy Spirit within human beings enable them to observe the Torah.⁷² The Torah’s commandments are not only “descriptions” of the results of Jesus’ faithfulness, but also, when taken their

⁶⁹ Dulin 2013, 40–43.

⁷⁰ “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

⁷¹ Le Cornu & Shulam 2005, 350.

⁷² Le Cornu & Shulam 2005, 334, 350.

nature as commandments literally, "prescriptions" for holy life, but the new covenant provides the Holy Spirit that empowers believers to carry them out.

In a similar way, Israel is not a metaphor, prefigure or type for the Church as the new, non-Jewish people of God, or "reconfigured around" Jesus as Levering says. Rather, Shulam takes an indexical approach to his definition of Israel, understanding it as "the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", to whom today's counterparts are ethnic Jews. Historically, Christianity has denied that there is any longer a special relationship between God and the Jews, and this is equal to forgetting or losing touch with one's roots. Shulam sees in Christianity a confusion of identities of the Jewish people as a whole and of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus. His ecclesiology is his attempt to fix this confusion.⁷³

With his strict criticism of spiritualizing hermeneutics, Shulam nevertheless uses the Temple and the Temple courts as a metaphor and does not speak of them literally when he talks about the people of God. The physical Temple in Jerusalem does not belong to the core aspirations of his ecclesiology in his writings, regardless of his otherwise literal orientation toward the interpretation of Scripture.

Shulam and Le Cornu discuss the issue about the Temple in their commentary on the book of Acts. In general, Jerusalem is spoken of as the light of the nations in prophetic literature, and symbols of this spiritual light are the Temple and its lampstand. However, the issue of the Jerusalem Temple was not unproblematic, and part of the problems stemmed from King Solomon's dilemma in 1 Kings 8:27: if the whole universe cannot contain God, how much less the Temple he was commanded to build? This dilemma of God's uncontainability created in the Second Temple period expectations of an eschatological Temple superior to the present one, and this tradition appears in the New Testament in Rev 21:22 as well. The Temple on earth made by human hands, while not denigrated by the early apostolic community, was only a pattern of the heavenly one, the Temple of the future messianic age, which is "built by God Himself", or even that God himself *is* the Temple as in the book of Revelation, with the Messiah as the lamp.⁷⁴

⁷³ Shulam 2011, 11–12.

⁷⁴ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 335–336, 363–365.

The New Testament is likely to have inherited this tradition of the spiritual temple from contemporary Second Temple Judaism. Ephesians 2, which is a central text for Shulam's ecclesiology, speaks of the assembly of the Messiah as a temple for the Holy Spirit. The church is the body of Messiah (1 Cor 12), and the body of Messiah is the eschatological temple (John 2:21). But because Shulam's Messianic Judaism holds the New Testament as a part of the Scripture that is the Word of God, the Temple metaphor is actually based on literal interpretation of the Bible.

2.3. Rootedness and Deeds

Anchoring in the concrete reality means that the application of the Word of God should also be concrete, and this is an essential part of being rooted in Shulam's theology. When he cites Jer. 17:5–9 and warns about trusting in men instead of God, he also voices his opinion on the doctrine of salvation by grace, and criticizes preachers who promise "instant salvation" without demanding the hearers to do good works. Trusting in such a person and his teaching brings a curse and spiritual withering.⁷⁵

This touches a central subject of soteriology about the relationship of faith and deeds, salvation and justification by faith, and the classic controversies concerning antinomianism and legalism. How does Shulam relate to grace as a free gift, and the requirement to keep the Torah?

Shulam states clearly that no one is saved by works nor earns salvation by keeping the commandments. One is saved by the grace and mercy of God that is a free gift. But he underscores that the salvation has the very purpose for making a person obedient to God through faith. Echoing James 2:18, Shulam says that one must "show our love by doing and giving". If faith is not followed by actions motivated by love after the person gets saved, it demonstrates that the person is not saved.⁷⁶

On the other hand, this does not mean that a person cannot be saved if he is unable to study and learn to do God's will who are, for example, mentally ill or ignorant, although God's will concerning believers is not only to save their souls but to also use them to advance his will.⁷⁷ So it seems that the need for showing one's faith through actions is not left unfulfilled if one is not able to do the works

⁷⁵ Shulam 2011, 29–30.

⁷⁶ Shulam 2011, 35.

⁷⁷ Shulam 2008, 107–108.

that are not under his control, but rather it might be understood as a form of disobedience that results from the unwillingness of the individual to keep the commandments and show love even though one is able.

Obedience to the Torah is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The Holy Spirit renews a person so that he is moved from the burdensome state of being "under the Torah" to being "under God's grace" and enables the person beyond merely keeping the "minimum" of the Torah observance and the "physical commandments" that are "easy" to keep. As a result, one is able to do what is "hard", to show genuine love for God and neighbour instead of hypocrisy. This is the concrete sign and testimony for, just like the life and history of the Jewish people, that everything "that is promised in the Bible is based on reality".⁷⁸

Roots are expressed through deeds also through celebrating the Sabbath and the biblical feasts, which are practical ways for Christians to connect with Israel. Shulam encourages his readers to try to keep Sabbath and "taste the wisdom of God". He suggests that the lack of Sabbath-keeping has been a reason behind the detrimental effects of modern American lifestyle on the health of families. He presents the Sabbath as a cure that not only helps to connect with God but with one's family as well.⁷⁹

In a similar way, celebration of Passover connects the believers to the redemptive history through the retelling of the story of Exodus. The communion plays the same role. One does not merely observe what has happened in the past, but connects with it and identifies with it, and this has a transformative effect on the believer's life by the realization "that in a way we are all coming out of Egypt and being delivered from slavery to this world and its powers and rulers into the Kingdom of God".⁸⁰

The observance of Torah does not relate only to the question about finding acceptance before God and human inability to live by his standards on one's own ability. Through keeping the commandments believers tap into the source of life that nourishes their daily life within the relationship with God that is based on grace. The concrete, practical observance of the commandments has the power to strengthen the identity of the believer and his identification with important themes of the Bible. This does not deny their significance as Messianic prefigurations of

⁷⁸ Shulam 2011, 35–36, 130–131..

⁷⁹ Shulam 2011, 111–112.

⁸⁰ Shulam 2009b, 20–21.

Jesus. Instead, they are appreciated as such not only as objects of theoretical study, but also as practices that makes the believers recall and connect with the person of Messiah even in the new covenant community.

3. God, Israel and the Church – The Elements of Ecclesiology

In Shulam's words, "Ecclesiology is greatly concerned with the relationship between God and his people and the identity of those people."⁸¹ He compares the believers in Jesus to trees who are planted in the Temple courts, but also to the building blocks of the Temple itself. In his reading of Ephesians 2:11–22, Shulam construes his ecclesiology as "a structure composed of three separate but connected parts: God, Israel and the Church". Without one of these three parts, the structure collapses, and misunderstandings in either of these parts will make the structure warped. When they are properly understood and applied, they form "a haven of refuge and a beautiful temple of the Living God in this troubled world".⁸²

3.1. Monotheism

The role of the doctrine of God in Shulam's ecclesiology is to both lay the foundation of all other teaching, but it is also the subject matter of the mission of the people of God. The Messiah as the Son of God, and Israel and the Church as the people of God, are the mediators of the knowledge of the One and only God – the Creator to the world.

Shulam pictures the current world in a desperate state. People worship false gods and strive to appease them out of enslaving fear. This darkness of idolatry began, according to Shulam, after the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, and Shulam sees that before that there were no idolatry or distinctions between nations. The split into nations began, and idolatry at the same time, and God chose Abraham in Genesis 12, right after the Tower of Babel, "to ensure that the world was not buried in the darkness of idolatry".⁸³

Israel's mission, according to Shulam, is to be "a light to the nations", and this means to overcome the darkness of idolatry and make the One God known to the world. Knowing God as Father and Creator is essential for one's faith. Without believing in God as Father and Creator one lives in idolatry, even though

⁸¹ Shulam 2011, 11.

⁸² Shulam 2011, 12–14.

⁸³ Shulam 2011, 9–10, 49–50.

he or she is Jewish or Christian. This lays the foundation for understanding all the other matters of faith. This implies that everything belongs to God, and that one is always dependent on God's sovereign will.⁸⁴

Shulam believes that Jesus is the Messiah whose mission is to restore the lost relationship with God. Using 1 Cor 8:6, Shulam states that believers "live *for* God, *through* the power of Yeshua the Messiah". Living for God means that the person realizes that his existence is dependent on God, and that his purpose of life is for pleasing God. Living through the Messiah means that the Son is the Father's "instrument" with which he created the world, and through whom believers have the ability to live for God. The relationship of the Father and the Son is understood in terms of both "absolute equality" and "hierarchy". The Son is, therefore, both equally divine with the Father, but also subordinate to him. Shulam explains this paradox by saying that "God is far too complex to limit Him to the rules of a geometry proof".⁸⁵

Emphasis on the Tower of Babel and idolatry is remarkable, especially because the story of the fall of Adam and Eve is totally absent from Shulam's ecclesiological discourse, even when he is explaining the redemption of the world. What is at the center of the picture is God's intention to save the world by means of destroying false objects of worship, and restoring the worship of the Heavenly Father to all mankind. The mission of the people of God is to work as the temple which is the seat of God's presence in the world.

The Christian answer to the question of idolatry and monotheism has been quite unambiguous throughout history: there is no God but one, who is the Creator of the world. God is conceived of in very absolute terms as the ultimate being behind, above and beyond everything else. In this area, Shulam's theology does not differ much from what belongs to classic Christian doctrine of God. Shulam's belief in both the divinity and humanity of the Messiah, who is the "instrument" with which the Father created the world, and whose relationship with the Father is "absolute equality" on the one hand, and "hierarchy" on the other, could find much common ground with classic Nicene formulations of the doctrine of Christ, though Shulam does not express his views in classic terminology.

⁸⁴ Shulam 2011, 15–19.

⁸⁵ Shulam 2011, 19–23.

3.2. Election of Israel

Israel and Jewish identity are of great concern for Shulam, and he understands Israel to be the "physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"⁸⁶, that is, in contrast with the idea of the Christian Church as the "Spiritual Israel". He defends the continuation of physical Israel as the people of God by appealing to Romans 11:1–5⁸⁷, where Paul begins his discourse with, "God has not forsaken his people". This passage is about unbelieving Israel.⁸⁸

Election is an important concept to Shulam. By this he refers to the fact that Israel was elected or chosen as the people of God. This election "has to do with functionality, what a person's job is". It does not refer to an individual's salvation, which is dependent "on a person's faithfulness to God". Election is not, according to Shulam, election of an individual to be saved, but a call to a duty for the collective people of Israel. Israel was elected for the duty to be a "light to the nations", to restore the knowledge of God.⁸⁹

In their commentary on Romans, Shulam and Le Cornu understand the election of Israel to constitute several elements or "advantages", based on Rom 3:1–2⁹⁰. The first and foremost are the oracles of God or the Torah that "stands at the center of Israel's election". The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was a special privilege that Israel received because by it even the world was created.⁹¹

Shulam and Le Cornu say that Paul was about to list a whole number of advantages that comprise the special privileges of Israel's election, but that Paul diverts from that topic in expectation to an objection to the advantage of being entrusted the "oracles of God", or the Torah. The basic objection is that Israel has not been faithful to the covenant that God made with them, and that they did not believe in the Messiah. From this point he goes on to an interlude and discusses the topics of righteousness, unrighteousness, and returns to finish the list of

⁸⁶ Shulam 2011, 11.

⁸⁷ "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."

⁸⁸ Shulam 2011, 42–44.

⁸⁹ Shulam 2011, 44–51.

⁹⁰ "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God."

⁹¹ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 125–126.

advantages of Jews in 9:4–5.⁹² The whole list of these advantages is as follows, with the items of the list in bold:

Romans 3:2 To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with **the oracles of God**.

Romans 9:4 and to them belong the **adoption**, the **glory**, the **covenants**, the **giving of the law**, the **worship**, and the **promises**.

Romans 9:5 To them belong the **patriarchs**, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the **Christ**, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

This list is the “job description” of Israel’s election, even though this does not automatically mean that all Israelites are faithful to act upon it. Patriarchs “are all of the illustrious forefathers of Israel, whose merit often stands on behalf of later generations.”⁹³ So part of Israel’s ministry included the ancestors who were examples of faith and faithfulness. But this is not merely a model to emulate, but the deeds of the ancestors also provide benefits that they have merited to later generations, as it is written, for example, in Gen 22:15–18⁹⁴.

So the merit of Abraham and, in fact, all the other patriarchs of Israel, laid the foundation for that Israel was elected. Commenting on Romans 11:28⁹⁵, Shulam writes,

He says clearly that they [Jews who do not believe in Jesus] are still the elect people of God because their election did not come due to their obedience. Election came as a result of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Israel is still the beloved people of God because of the Patriarchs.⁹⁶

The faithfulness of the patriarchs laid the foundation for all the other advantages. These advantages partially overlap, and in Shulam and Le Cornu’s reckoning, “covenants” and “promises” seem to be umbrella terms, under which other advantages are listed. “Covenants” comprehend those of circumcision, the giving of the Torah (which is listed separately in Romans 9:4) and the new covenant. “Promises” God gave to Israel are the descendants that cannot be

⁹² Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 126–127, 325.

⁹³ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 327.

⁹⁴ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, **because you have done this** and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, **because you have obeyed my voice**.” (emphases mine)

⁹⁵ “As regards the gospel, they [the part of Israel that is “hardened” towards the gospel] are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.”

⁹⁶ Shulam 2011, 56.

counted, the promised land, the royal house of David from which the Messiah also is born, the (giving of the) Holy Spirit and the new covenant.⁹⁷

Election does not, however, secure one's relationship with God, but requires faithfulness, which Shulam and Le Cornu treat at length commenting on Romans 2:25–29⁹⁸. The status of being a Jew and studying the Torah does not amount to the required faithfulness, but rather one has to also practise what one studies. This is the circumcision of the heart, that is, to be faithful to God's covenant relationship with man by doing God's will. In this sense, a Gentile who keeps the Torah is more circumcised than a Jew who does not.⁹⁹

This reasoning might lead someone to think that Jews do not have any special kind of election, besides the obligation of faithfulness to God. Shulam and Le Cornu understand Paul's argument continuing in Rom 3:1–2 so that Paul wants to counter this kind of thinking and defend Israel's continued election as the chosen people, regardless of its current unfaithfulness.

But physical descent with circumcision and membership in the physical nation of Israel is not all that is expected of the people of Israel. Shulam and Le Cornu write that “even though Israel's election is sure, those who inherit God's promise to Abraham as the people (sons) of ‘Israel’ themselves are only those who are in fact Abraham's disciples and exhibit his ‘qualities’.”¹⁰⁰ The idea of being a disciple of Abraham is drawn from *Pirkei Avot*¹⁰¹ where it says that “The disciples of Abraham, our father, [possess] a good eye, a humble spirit and a lowly soul.”¹⁰² In other words, they exhibit obedience to the Torah and are, therefore, Jews “inwardly” and not merely “outwardly” (see Rom 2:28–29).

Shulam's teaching on election is a radical challenge to other views on the doctrine of election and predestination. While those theologies that view the election to concern only the believers, Shulam has a different definition for election altogether. Election is given to a specific people to carry out a specific

⁹⁷ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 327.

⁹⁸ “For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

⁹⁹ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 106–113.

¹⁰⁰ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 328–329.

¹⁰¹ A part of Mishnah, the earliest Rabbinic Jewish text, whose compilation is dated around 200 CE.

¹⁰² Mishnah, m.Avot 5:19. Cited in Shulam & Le Cornu, 109.

duty. In this way, Shulam preserves two important Jewish commitments: Israel will always be a special, chosen people of God, and that man has the free will to choose between obedience leading to salvation and disobedience leading to destruction (cf. Deut 30:15–20).

3.3. Church – Gentiles Joining with Israel

The primary purpose of Israel's election in Shulam's theology is that the other nations of the world would know the Creator and leave the darkness of sin and idolatry behind. Without the other nations, the identity of Israel would not bear any meaning. So writing about Israel's identity, Shulam addresses it indirectly as an issue of great relevance not for Jews only, but for the whole world.

Shulam's point of departure for understanding non-Jewish believer identity is Ephesians 2:11–22. When a Gentile comes to believe in Jesus, he joins the people of Israel as fellow citizens with the Jews in the “commonwealth of Israel”. He ceases to be a Gentile (apparently, in the sense of ‘idol-worshipper’) and he becomes a “child of Abraham”. They partake of “the covenants, the promises, the God of Israel and the Scriptures of Israel”.¹⁰³ This multitude of non-Jews joined with Israel is what Shulam calls the Church. He also emphasizes several times that this group does not replace Israel but joins with it to form the total people of God. The Church is seen as the extension of Israel, and the fulfillment of its election.¹⁰⁴

Israel's mission towards the nations is two-folded. First, Israel is there to include the Gentiles into the community of the people of God. They are not separate individuals believing the same creed as Israel, but they have a communal identity in Israel. However, Shulam never indicates that these non-Jews will be absorbed into the Jewish community as Jews. They join into Israel as the Church, a distinct group from Jews within the same “commonwealth”. In this way, Shulam represents Lancaster's radial ecclesiological model: Israel and the Church are rather the inner and outer rims of the same circle, not two overlapping circles. At the same time, it is not a supersessionist model where either Jewish or non-Jewish identity is superseded by the other.

Second, in including Gentiles into the commonwealth, Israel shares with these non-Jews the benefits of the “advantages” of the election. Gentile believers inherit the promise given to Abraham about the great multitude of descendants. Shulam sees it problematic to view only the 14–16 million Jews (in Shulam's

¹⁰³ Shulam 2011, 53–54.

¹⁰⁴ Shulam 2011, 60–64.

estimation) as the offspring of Abraham. The Jewish nation could have, according to him, become as large as one billion, but that persecutions have taken their heavy toll and kept the Jewish people very small. Rather, referring to the “great multitude that no one could number” from Rev 7:9, he understands the Gentile believers to be the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham about the countless number of offspring.¹⁰⁵

The Church also benefits from the “advantage” of the Torah, because it has “a direct and eternal relationship with Israel”. The Church has its roots in this relationship, which is often obscured by the “traditions of men who twisted the Word of God”. However, the relationship with Israel and its Torah is not characterized by being under a burden, or “under the Torah”, but that the blessing that the Torah bestows (which is discussed in chapter 2.2.) is keeping it “under God’s grace”, which means that the Holy Spirit provides the power to observe the Torah.¹⁰⁶

Shulam and Le Cornu discuss the τέλος (telos) of the Torah mentioned by Paul in Rom 10:4¹⁰⁷ in relation to the unfaithfulness of Israel and the inclusion of Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel. They connect this to Torah’s “witness” for God’s righteousness (Rom 3:21–22¹⁰⁸) that is not confined to Israel only but also to Gentiles. Disobedience of Israel involves both the rejection of Jesus as the τέλος for righteousness by faith in him and that Gentiles are included into Israel through that faith. While Gentiles accept the faith in the God of Israel through Jesus, it is to provoke Israel to jealousy for their own God so that they might be saved.¹⁰⁹

Shulam understands the salvation as a gradual process of restoration to the order of things that God intended, and it manifests on both individual and collective levels. A person’s salvation begins with the longing for salvation, then continues to confession of faith, repentance, baptism and the new way of life. It is also the process toward the fulfillment of the promises of God for Israel and the Church, and restoration to the roots of faith in both camps. The people of Israel is restored to the land of Israel, and the land’s recovery from desolation also

¹⁰⁵ Shulam 2011, 66–67.

¹⁰⁶ Shulam 2011, 56–57, 129–131.

¹⁰⁷ “For Christ is the end [τέλος] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

¹⁰⁸ “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

¹⁰⁹ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 136–137, 356.

witnesses for that the process of salvation is going on, as well as the fact that a growing number of Jews discover Jesus as the Messiah. On the side of the Church, Christians rediscover their faith's origins in Israel and Judaism and what that realization entails, and there is a growing love for the people and the land of Israel.¹¹⁰

Shulam points a great failure on the part of the Church when it comes to its duty to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom 11:11, 14). "God has waited 2000 years to see this happen, but unfortunately, instead of provoking Israel to jealousy, the Christian churches have managed over and over again provoke Israel to anger and hate and alienation from Yeshua the Messiah."¹¹¹

He obviously refers to antisemitism and anti-Judaism, which have hindered Jews from accepting Jesus as their Messiah, and Christians from recognizing Israel as the core of the Church. The purpose of the Church is to provoke Israel to jealousy for their own God when they see their own God approached by Gentiles in worship, and are filled with zeal for worship God as well. Through this process, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26), and then there will be "life from the dead" (Rom 11:15).

This processual thinking appears also in his understanding of personal salvation. As we saw in the previous chapter, being a true child of Abraham by faith is equated with being his disciple, because the study of Scripture is essential for one's walk of faith. Just like Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8), study is for the follower of Jesus a process by which he discovers his or her roots. Personal Bible study also teaches the disciple to rely on God and not human teachers who teach "human doctrines" and "Christian creeds" that might contradict the Word of God in the Bible. One of these "doctrines" that Shulam harshly criticizes is teaching forgiveness and salvation without the demand of keeping the commandments. On the one hand, he says that "No one is saved by works", but on the other hand he says that "if a person does not do anything after he 'gets saved,' then he is not saved at all".¹¹² The process begins by coming to faith, but it proceeds to further stages, developing and maturing gradually.

Shulam has much in common with James who writes that faith without works is dead, and that Abraham had faith first but through works his faith was

¹¹⁰ Shulam 2009a, 6–7.

¹¹¹ Shulam 2009a, 7.

¹¹² Shulam 2011, 28–31, 34–35.

perfected (James 2:14–26). The key concept is whether the faith “lives” or is “dead”. Shulam compares a person’s spiritual life to a tree that has roots in the soil of the courts of God’s Temple. To extend this metaphor, the believer draws nourishment from the ground of his faith, but it results in producing fruit. Fruits do not cause or merit salvation, but one can “show” one’s faith (James 2:18) through them as a proof of living faith.

3.4. Oneness of God, His People and the World

Shulam’s ecclesiology can be characterized as having a unity with distinct identities. Israel, called to be the light to the nations, is the commonwealth where both Jews and Gentiles together have fellowship with one another and with God as the temple of God’s presence in the world. This is made possible by Israel’s Messiah, through whom the people of God can “live for God”.

This unity has a variety of people in it, with Jews and Gentiles who, though part of the same commonwealth of Israel, have distinct identities as Jews and Gentiles. Shulam takes up Gal 3:28¹¹³ as an example of a passage that is used to argue against the continuing relevance of Jewish identity when a Jew believes in Jesus. He refutes this view by comparing the unity of Jewish and non-Jewish believers to the unity between husband and wife. Husband and wife, though they become “one”, do not cease to be male and female with their respective gender identities and roles when they marry or when coming to faith in Jesus. Likewise, being “one” in faith in the Messiah does not cancel the Jewish and Gentile identities. Rather, being “one” in the Messiah simply means that everyone has equal standing and value as God’s children, irrespective of their human identities. This kind of unity is analogous with that of the Father and the Son in the Godhead: there is both equality and hierarchy. The Son is one with the Father but submits to His will and is distinguishable from the Father.¹¹⁴

Oneness, as opposed to the “multiplicatory” aspect of sin, belongs to the essence of God and His people, and the final aim for the redemption of the world. “Just as God is one – and His Messiah is one with Him – so in Jesus all wo/mankind are also shaped anew in the image of the One and Only”. Sin creates divisions, while God is the One who unites through the mediator, the Messiah. Unity is expressed in the central text of Judaism – the Shema (Deut 6:4–5) –

¹¹³ ”There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

¹¹⁴ Shulam 2011, 23–24.

which is both the confession of God's Oneness and the commandment to love God with one's whole being: "heart, soul and strength".¹¹⁵

The Oneness of God has ethical implications. Shulam cites Mal 2:10¹¹⁶, where he derives the idea of "breaking faith with one another", which is the result of the lack of consciousness that there is only one God who has created every human being. Because God is the Creator of everything, all people are responsible to him, and no one can escape to the territory of another god. Monotheism also does away with all prejudice and racism, because everyone has the same Father.¹¹⁷

The Oneness of God and the oneness of God's people has its aim in the wholeness of the world that is currently broken. Shulam refers to the Jewish term *tikkun olam* (תיקון עולם), the fixing of the world, to communicate this.¹¹⁸ This term is widely used in the Jewish culture. Gilbert S. Rosenthal traces the development and use of the term from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages to the modern era. In the Talmud, it refers to legal amendments, mainly in the context of marriage and finances, to "improve the society" by fixing social flaws and inequality. A few times it is used in a moral or spiritual sense concerning sins or piety. In the Middle Ages and onwards, it was used in Kabbalistic mysticism, most notably in the Zohar¹¹⁹ and by Rabbi Isaac Luria, to refer to fixing the world from its brokenness due to sin by observing the commandments and making the world better able to receive the divine light. In the twentieth century, the term gained popularity and it has become the rubric for the Jewish responsibility for the affairs of the world to make it a better place to live, with varying emphases on its societal, ecological, spiritual and eschatological aspects.¹²⁰

The elements of Shulam's version of *tikkun olam* are the calling of Abraham and the election of the people of Israel and Jesus the Messiah born from the nation of Israel, to restore all humanity to the worship of One God through Jesus the Messiah. Just like God is one, so the world will be one and whole. This soteriological vision comes quite close to what is said in the *Aleinu* prayer in the Siddur, the traditional Jewish prayer book:

We therefore hope in You, O Lord our God that we may speedily see Your glorious power, when all the abominations will be removed from the earth and

¹¹⁵ Le Cornu & Shulam 2005, 227–231, 251–253.

¹¹⁶ "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

¹¹⁷ Shulam 2011, 31–33.

¹¹⁸ Shulam 2011, 50.

¹¹⁹ Zohar is the main text of medieval Jewish mysticism.

¹²⁰ Rosenthal 2005, 214–240.

all the idols will be abolished; when the world will be mended and improved under the kingship of the Almighty, and all creatures will call upon Your name and the wicked will turn to You.¹²¹

4. Ecclesiology and Judaism

Shulam's idea of roots is connected to the concrete forms of Jewish communal life and culture. Here in this chapter, I will examine what elements Shulam adopts from Jewish social and cultural heritage. Further we will consider how this shapes the interpretation and application of the Bible for the community. Especially how it affects Gentile identity among a culturally and theologically Jewish people of God, centered around Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

4.1. Synagogue and the Church

Shulam distinguishes between the *ekklesia* or the Church, and the synagogue. To Shulam, *ekklesia* is not a socio-religious institution or a building, but a community and a spiritual family. On the other hand, the synagogue is a Jewish social institution that is a place of worship for both Jews that believe in Jesus and those who do not. It is the social framework that is the ideal for Messianic Judaism. The New Testament refers to the spiritual community of the believers in Jesus as the Church or ἐκκλησία, and the social institution that they gathered for meetings with the word συναγωγή (*synagōgē*), or ἐπισυναγωγή (*episynagōgē*) in Hebrews 10:25.¹²²

The synagogue is distinguished from the Temple in that it was not commanded in the Torah but is an innovation of the Second Temple Period. Unlike the Temple, it does not have an “innate” or “physical” holiness attached to the place and sacred objects, and it is not reserved only for worship services with specifically consecrated priesthood to lead it. Rather, synagogue covers all the areas of life, such as education, charity and worship services, and its life is centered around the learning and practising of Torah.¹²³

Shulam and Le Cornu note many similarities between the synagogue life and the life of the church in the New Testament. The early apostolic community of Acts 2:42 – the verse which Shulam specifically refers to in comparing it to the synagogue – is characterized by four elements: devotion to the teaching of the apostles, breaking of bread, prayers and fellowship. Each of these elements are connected to the Rabbinic Jewish or Qumranic customs. Fellowship (κοινωνία) is

¹²¹ Cited in Rosenthal 2005, 220.

¹²² Shulam 2013, 18–19. Also, Shulam 2011, 59–60.

¹²³ Shulam 2013, 17, 20.

seen as an umbrella term to cover all the other elements. It is understood as “a common sharing or participation in a common cause”. It is the community of the “many” who are one “body” in their faith in the Messiah. “Prayers” is considered to be participation in the regular prayer times at the Temple. Devotion to the teaching of the apostles is identified with the Rabbinic preoccupation with a life of Torah study. This study is in the fellowship of *chaverim* (חברים, ‘companions’). Breaking bread is understood as shared meals among the believers, bread being the basic food staple that symbolizes God’s sustenance.¹²⁴ The *chaverim* gathered for shared meals for several social purposes, such as “Torah study, the intercalation of the month, Pesach [Passover], circumcisions, betrothals, weddings, funerals, and mourning”¹²⁵, and the early apostolic κοινῶνία seemed to have a similar lifestyle.

Shulam identifies the apostolic church and the Pharisaic synagogue on the sociological level, but theologically, he sees the apostolic community as superior, because it is given the Holy Spirit. The synagogue institution is a model for understanding the apostolic church of the first century, but because it is not directly based on a biblical commandment and instructions for its foundation, it is nevertheless a manmade institution.¹²⁶

Though the synagogue is manmade, Shulam does not discard it altogether. On the contrary, he sees the preservation of both Judaism and Christianity as God’s intention that in this age Christians would discover their roots of faith by learning about Judaism and the synagogue, and that Jews would learn about the Messiah. The Messianic synagogue can work as the common ground where Jews and Christians can return to “our true faith”. He is skeptical about his own generation, “educated and raised in Egypt” and “part of the Christian denominational world”, and their abilities to attain his ideal of Messianic Judaism, but he is more hopeful of the generation after him whose leaders might be better equipped to be “100% Jews and 100% followers of Yeshua”. This positive development is to Shulam a move of the Holy Spirit, but on the human level it is carried out through building congregations and educational institutions that promote the value of Messianic Judaism and Jewish roots of Christianity.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 145–150.

¹²⁵ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 149.

¹²⁶ Shulam 2013, 20–21.

¹²⁷ Shulam 2013, 23.

Shulam's groundwork for this is his hermeneutics and teaching about principles of Jewish education in his *Hidden Treasures*.

4.2. Messianic Jewish Hermeneutics and Halakhah

4.2.1. Jewish Cultural Background

Shulam writes that "Hermeneutics, or the way we understand the Word of God, is one of the keys to both spiritual health and the unity of the people of God."¹²⁸ He is emphatic that Bible study that is faithful to the Bible must be consciously regulated by interpretative principles, because no one can just "read" the Bible but is always influenced by his background.¹²⁹

The interpretative framework for the Bible is from the Jewish culture, in which the Bible was written. Shulam cites Romans 3:1–2 to point to the importance of the knowledge and respect for Judaism in one's study of the Bible. Jews are "entrusted with the oracles of God" in two ways. First is the text of the Hebrew Bible itself that Jewish scribes have written and preserved and meticulously worked on even the finest details of textual criticism. Second, this implies that because the biblical text was written in Jewish cultural setting, it is understandable within that cultural framework and therefore requires knowledge of the Jewish culture contemporary to the biblical text.¹³⁰

How the Jewish background of the Bible is understood can be found in the introductions of the commentaries on Romans and Galatians. Paul is not treated as a 'Christian' or the 'founder of Christianity' as opposed to being a Jew, but as a Jew from a Pharisaic background who wrote within the context of Judaism. The primary textual sources of reference for interpreting Paul's letters are Jewish texts from the Second Temple era, but also from the Rabbinic literature of Late Antiquity, because it is understood to be an heir to the Second Temple Pharisaic Judaism.¹³¹ Shulam and Le Cornu respond to this problem by appealing to the oral transmission of the materials of which the Rabbinic works are composed and that these materials date much earlier than the time of their compilation in their literary forms.¹³²

Pharisaic and Rabbinic tradition subsequent to the formation of the biblical canon is also worthy of exploration in its own right. This tradition, codified today

¹²⁸ Shulam 2008, 64.

¹²⁹ Shulam 2008, 74–75.

¹³⁰ Shulam 2008, 25–26, 76–77.

¹³¹ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 1–11; Le Cornu & Shulam 2005, xxiii–xxvi.

¹³² Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 8–9.

in Rabbinic literature, is not only an instrument to reconstruct the first-century setting, but Orthodox Judaism serves as a living tradition that should be respected and studied by believers. In many places, he cites Matthew 23 where it says that scribes and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. By this verse he argues that Jesus agreed with the Pharisaic doctrine that they have inherited the position and authority of Moses to give authoritative rulings and interpretations of Scripture.¹³³

These two aspects, the Word of God and the Rabbinic tradition, form the basis of Shulam's hermeneutical theory that should guide the Bible interpretation of the Messianic Jewish movement. This is a process that ultimately should result not only in understanding but practical application of the Word of God. The applications are not ad hoc, but expected to form a coherent set of rulings that is called the *halakhah* (הלכה) in Judaism, and which should guide and unite the movement. I will now delve into these two issues, hermeneutics and *halakhah*.

4.2.2. PaRDeS Model of Jewish Hermeneutics

When discussing hermeneutics, Shulam uses the Jewish acronym PaRDeS to describe his multi-layered approach to the Scripture. He does not use the term systematically over the course of his book, but I will use it as a tool to analyze and categorize the elements of his hermeneutical theory as a whole. PaRDeS is an acronym formed from the initials of four Hebrew words to form the word *pardes* (פרדס), which means 'orchard' or 'garden'. Each one of the four words represents a level of interpretation, and together they form a whole hermeneutic treatment of Scripture. The first level is *peshat* (פשוט), which is the plain, literal or literary sense of the text. The second level, *remez* (רמז), examines the meaning that is not stated explicitly but implicitly hinted at. The third level is *drash* or *derash* (דרש), which associates the Scripture passage with other passages. The fourth level is *sod* (סוד), which means "secret", and it is a meaning that "only the initiated can understand", namely, the esoteric meaning.¹³⁴

This idea of fourfold meaning of Scripture, and the acronym specifically, is not present in Second Temple Judaism but it is a medieval invention. According to A. van der Heide, it originates from late thirteenth century Jewish scholarship, when several Jewish scholars sought to distinguish between several different levels of interpretations, but with varying terms to describe these levels. It is possible that the fourfold schemes are influenced by or have affinities with the

¹³³ Shulam 2008, 76–78, 99–102; Shulam 2011, 83–84; Shulam 2013, 21.

¹³⁴ Shulam 2008, 20–23.

Christian medieval theory of the four senses of Scripture, but this cannot be adequately proven. The PaRDeS scheme is likely to be invented by Moses de León (c. 1240–1305), the author or compiler of the Zohar. The constituent words of the abbreviation echo the different interpretative traditions of Jewish exegesis: *derash*, being a cognate of *midrash*, recalls the classic Rabbinic interpretations of Late Antiquity, while *peshat* evokes the medieval, more linguistically oriented commentators. *Remez* and *sod* point to the perceived “deeper” meanings, “mysteries” introduced by Jewish philosophers (*remez*) and Kabbalistic mystics (*sod*). However, van der Heide concludes that PaRDeS is not an exact methodology, but rather a wordplay and a slogan of a kind for the program to advance and legitimate Kabbalistic teaching.¹³⁵

Shulam uses Jewish terminology like PaRDeS that has its origins in Kabbalistic traditions, but does not promote Kabbalistic esotericism. Both *tikkun olam* and PaRDeS are adopted into wider usage in Jewish culture, so these words are not restricted to the context of Kabbalah. In all likelihood, Shulam uses these terms in a popular fashion.

Apparently, the *peshat* level is most extensively expounded in *Hidden Treasures* because it deals with the grammatical, literary, cultural and historical features of the text. Shulam’s view of Scripture is that in order to understand it properly one must take into account its original language, historical setting, literary genre and Jewish background.¹³⁶ In short, *peshat* represents the approach of modern academic biblical studies.

Remez aspect of the PaRDeS is the “hinted meaning, which at times can only be discerned (from) between the lines”¹³⁷, but Shulam does not offer any more detailed description of how *remez* works. He does not use the term often. Van der Heide suggests that in modern scholarship “*remez* is usually taken to denote the allegorical interpretations introduced by the [medieval Jewish] philosophers”¹³⁸. Michael Fishbane also attributes an allegorical sense to *remez*, but as a “principle of order” that is external to the text, to systematize its contents and “give it life”. For if interpreted with the *peshat* only, the “the text ‘in itself’ is majestically silent”. *Remez* is then the active role of the interpreter’s mind to give

¹³⁵ Van der Heide 1983, 148–158.

¹³⁶ Shulam 2008, 79–81.

¹³⁷ Shulam 2008, 21.

¹³⁸ Van der Heide 1983, 148.

meaning to the otherwise “majestically silent” text and connect it to his own life reality.¹³⁹

Fishbane’s “principle of order” that “gives life” to the text, though Shulam does not connect it to the idea of *remez*, and to allegory even less, is nevertheless present in Shulam’s thinking in the context of discussing the application of the commandments. Shulam takes the issue of wearing the *kippah* (כִּיפָה; Jewish skullcap) and the covering of one’s head in the worship service as an example of the need to understand whether the commandment written in the Scripture applies for all people, in all places and at all times, or if it is tied to the time and place of the situation the commandment was given. The whole cultural context in which the commandments were given was different in many respects compared to the twenty-first century world, such as that it was largely agrarian and less urban than today, and without the technological development that has taken place since then, and thereby the writers did not have many of the questions in mind that the modern believers have. *Midrash* – classic Jewish exegesis – is a way to both resolve problems within the text, and bridge the gap between the Bible and the milieu of modern readers of the Bible, and make *halakhah* for the community today.¹⁴⁰

However, there is another, simpler, and maybe better, definition for Shulam’s version of *remez*, related to his teaching of Jesus’ parables. According to Shulam, “The Parables were tools for the rabbis that gave them the ability to address difficult religious subjects and political issues without total exposure to their enemies and critics.”¹⁴¹ For example, in the parable of the mustard seed Jesus did ignore the facts that the mustard seed is, literally speaking, not the smallest seed in the Middle Eastern plants, and that the mustard plant will not grow into a tree big enough to host bird nests. However, his reference to the seed and the tree that hosts birds of the sky refer to the people of Israel, because the word “seed” is typically not used in the Bible to refer to plants, but to people. The tree image comes from Ezekiel 17:23–24, where Israel and Babylonia are compared to trees and where the tree representing Israel is exalted and made green.¹⁴² This message was politically sensitive in the time of Roman occupation of the Jewish land, because the kingdom of God was expected to overthrow the

¹³⁹ Fishbane 1975, 713–715.

¹⁴⁰ Shulam 2008, 86–90.

¹⁴¹ Shulam 2007, 4.

¹⁴² Shulam 2007, 6–7.

empires and kingdoms of the world and bring about the age when the Messiah rules over Israel and all nations. It was necessary to tell a parable that only hinted at the message of the kingdom, rather than telling it openly and explicitly.

Derash is based on “textual associations in which a word in one text reminds the reader of another text”¹⁴³. It follows the hermeneutical rules (or *middot*) of rabbis of Late Antiquity, of which Shulam explains the seven rules of Hillel. These rules can be classified into broader categories. Rules number one¹⁴⁴, five¹⁴⁵ and seven¹⁴⁶ can be characterized as philosophical principles that do not define a specific method or technique, but rather give some logical presuppositions for interpretation. Rules number two¹⁴⁷, three¹⁴⁸ and four¹⁴⁹ connect verses based on similar verbal expressions or concepts to make a point. Rule number six¹⁵⁰ is a guideline for dealing with two verses that yield contradictory information and to reconcile the conflict by explaining it with a third verse.¹⁵¹

¹⁴³ Shulam 2008, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Kal ve-chomer* (קל וחומר), “light and heavy”, or “a fortiori” in Latin. This appears often in the New Testament in the form of “how much more”, such as in Matthew 7:11, Romans 11:12 & 24, and Hebrews 9:14. This teaches the principle of analogy between things of lesser and greater importance, or “weight”, and that an argument concerning a “weightier” matter can be strengthened by pointing out the validity of an argument concerning a “lighter” matter that resembles the “weightier” one.

¹⁴⁵ *Kelal uferat* (כלל ופרט), “general and particular”. General principle works as a rubric under which several particular items are categorized. For example, Shulam and Le Cornu (1998, 126) mention the “advantages” of Jews in Romans 3:2 and 9:4–5 as the particulars of the general principle of the election of Israel.

¹⁴⁶ *Davar ha-nilmad me-inyano* (דבר הנלמד מענינו), “Thing learnt from the context”. To Shulam, this is the most important of the seven rules (2008, 62–63.), because he sees one of the fundamental problems of allegorization to take the verse out of its context and read into it meanings external to it (2008, 23–25.).

¹⁴⁷ *Gezerah shavah* (גזרה שווה), “Equal cut”. This is called “verbal analogy” that connects two verses based on a shared word or verbal expression in both verses. Shulam (2008, 54–55.) takes Hebrews 3:6–4:13 as a New Testament example of *gezerah shavah*, where the connection is made on the basis of the expressions “works”, “rest” and “today” that are shared between Gen 2:2 and Psalm 95:7–11.

¹⁴⁸ *Binyan av mikatuv echad* (בנין אב מכתוב אחד), “Family from one text”. This method is used to build a “family” around one Scripture passage that is further elaborated by citing a series of other Scripture passages that include the same concepts to accumulate evidence for the point made. The criterion for citing the passages is that the concept or word must be the main subject of the passage. Shulam (2008, 56–57.) cites Hebrews 9:11–22 as an example, with Exodus 24:8 as its main source text to associate the establishment of the covenant with blood, and the conclusion of this Hebrews passage is in verse 22 where it says that forgiveness requires shedding of blood. (The other texts, though, are only implicitly referred to and not explicitly cited in Hebrews 9:11–22, and they precede the citation of the main text, Exodus 24:8.)

¹⁴⁹ *Binyan av mishnei ketuvim* (בנין אב משני כתובים), “Family from two texts”. As *Binyan av mikatuv echad*, but the main textual source is composed of two texts, such as in Hebrews 1:5–14 the texts are Psalm 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14, to prove that the Messiah is superior to angels, because he is referred to as the Son of God and the angels are not. (Shulam 2008, 58–59.)

¹⁵⁰ *Kayotze bo mimakom acher* (כיוצא בו ממקום אחר), “Analogy made from another passage”.

¹⁵¹ Shulam 2008, 48–64.

Shulam, however, promotes these classic Rabbinic approaches with some reservations, saying that they are not applicable to every situation.¹⁵² This is understandable in the light that he favours rule number seven that advises to derive the meaning of the passage from its context. After the first century CE, the school of Rabbi Ishmael extended the set of rules into thirteen and emphasized the human character of the scriptural language, but it was the rival school of Rabbi Akiva that triumphed, teaching that even the language of Scripture was divine. Akiva's approach created interpretations quite freely, using the biblical passages in quite an atomistic way.¹⁵³

Benjamin D. Sommer explains the reason for the atomism of Rabbinic exegesis. Because it was believed that not only the message but also the language of the Scripture was divine, which meant that one utterance therein could contain virtually infinite possibilities for interpretation. Because it was God speaking in the text, every single detail was intentional and not coincidental. The context by which the text was explained was the whole canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, and in regard to interpretation, the text was perceived as composed of verses, but not of chapters or biblical books. The literary forms were mere "surface contexts" and accidental to the transmission of divine word, and thus less important. Because it was the same God who inspired all the canonical texts, all the verses were potentially relevant to the verse that was being interpreted. However, there was only a limited number of those texts who had an actual connection to the verse and capacity to explain it, and this link was usually pinpointed by the appearance of a rare word, a hard phrase or another textual difficulty that appeared in another verse. The difficulty was solved by looking at the verses in light of each other, and this could unpack a new bit of information from God's revelation that is tightly packed with meaning.¹⁵⁴

Shulam does not, however, perceive the local context of biblical verses in the way the early rabbis did, as mere "surface contexts", but as essential for understanding the verse properly. This is probably the reason for his reservations about the seven rules of Hillel. However, he does guide his readers to see unusual textual features in the Hebrew text as catalysts for midrashic interpretations, instead of seeing them as mere scribal errors.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Shulam 2008, 64.

¹⁵³ Thiselton 2009, 63.

¹⁵⁴ Sommer 2012, 66–69.

¹⁵⁵ Shulam 2008, 33–36.

Sod is the esoteric level of understanding the Scripture. Shulam is not a Kabbalist and he does not argue for the validity of Kabbalistic mystic tradition, but his hermeneutics has a dimension that can be understood as *sod*, the level of meaning that only the “initiated” can understand and that is therefore dependent on one’s spirituality. Here and there Shulam notes that it is necessary for the interpreter to be guided by the Holy Spirit to arrive at correct interpretations.¹⁵⁶

As said above, the apostolic community is sociologically homologous with the synagogue, but on a spiritual level it is superior to the synagogue because it is given the Holy Spirit, through whom believers are initiated into the new covenant community of Jewish and Gentile believers. This can be identified with the *sod* aspect of the Messianic Jewish theological program: Jesus the Messiah has revealed “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 13:11) to his disciples, the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” that is discerned by the believers who have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2).

I would apply van der Heide’s conclusion about the PaRDeS model to Shulam as well. It could be seen as a shorthand expression for his hermeneutical program, which seeks to take seriously both the literary and linguistic features of the text (*peshat*), the Pharisaic-Rabbinic Jewish tradition of interpretation (*derash*) as well as its spiritual character as inspired word of God whose sense is clarified by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the “initiated”, or believers (*sod*). Scripture could also use roundabout language to teach about matters that were sensitive issues at the time, so it is important to be aware of the possibility of subtle hints (*remez*), of which parables are good examples.

Hermeneutics is a way to be able to see the fullness of the biblical teaching, but understanding is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to guide the practical lives of believers, and for this purpose Jews formulate *halakhah*.

4.2.3. Messianic Jewish Halakhah

By *halakhah* (הלכה) Jews refer to the authoritative application of the Torah that is based on a Rabbinic process of discussion and interpretation.¹⁵⁷ Because the noun *halakhah* literally means ‘walk’, Shulam connects it to the New Testament language of one’s walk in faith (such as 1 Thess 2:12 and Rom 13:13), and believes that the writers of the New Testament pursued the formation of *halakhah*

¹⁵⁶ Shulam 2008, 71, 79, 93.

¹⁵⁷ “The term comes from the Hebrew root ‘to walk’ and refers generally to the body of legal rulings derived by various forms of exegesis from Scripture and specifically to a particular ruling.” Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, ix.

for their own communities. In Shulam's reading, right to "bind" and "loose" in Matthew 16:19 also refers to formation of apostolic *halakhah*.¹⁵⁸

Halakhah is an important concept for ecclesiology in two ways. First, who is recognized as a halakhic authority is also recognized as a spiritual authority to all in the movement. Moreover, the authority has a distinctly Jewish stamp, because *halakhah* is based on a hermeneutic with Rabbinic Jewish presuppositions and heritage. Second, the application of *halakhah* will require a wide acceptance of these presuppositions and heritage on the grassroots level of congregational life. *Halakhah* and related concepts are developed in the context of Jewish theology and praxis, and becomes understandable only in that framework.

Shulam thinks the Messianic Jewish movement is not ready to make its own *halakhah* that would be credible and fruitful. It lacks tradition and education about Judaism, but it is necessary to have these to be a genuinely Jewish movement. It also lacks the unity required for making its own halakhic decisions that would be widely acceptable. There is a threat that at this point attempts to formulate *halakhah* would only split and not unite the movement. Making *halakhah* should also be separated from "politics and power plays" and should be based only on integrity of faith. It is also essential that it takes the New Testament halakhic decisions as authoritative, and also respects Jewish tradition. Despite all the challenges and immaturity in the movement concerning its Jewish identity, however, Shulam believes it might become possible, but the way to that goal must be walked carefully, with high moral integrity, prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁹

Shulam raises Matthew 23:1–4 as an important passage pertinent to making Messianic Jewish *halakhah* today. In this passage, Jesus tells the crowds and his disciples to do what the scribes and the Pharisees teach, because they "sit on Moses' seat". In Shulam's view, the seat of Moses refers to the seat in the synagogue where the rabbi or other preacher sat down on to expound on the Torah and make halakhic rulings. Pharisees represented a Judaism that did not restrict knowing the will of God to consulting a priest or a prophet, but that anyone can study the Torah and learn the will of God through study. Jesus had much in common with the Pharisees in this respect. Shulam does not believe that Jesus gives them a binding authority to whatever they teach, because Messianic Jews

¹⁵⁸ Shulam 2008, 97–98.

¹⁵⁹ Shulam 2008, 102–106.

have to add their own perspective in the spirit of Jesus' teaching. However, *halakhah* according to traditional Orthodox Judaism, the modern heir to Pharisaism, is to be respected, studied and evaluated carefully.¹⁶⁰

Shulam and Le Cornu connect the *halakhah* to the Pauline concept of "walk in the Spirit" and the spiritual gifts. When God made Jews and Gentiles into "one new man", he gave them his Spirit to enable them for good works, or "walk in the Spirit". In Romans 12, Paul gives guidelines for the halakhic outworking of the Torah and the unity of all believers in the Spirit. The same Spirit also gave specific gifts to each individual member of the body, which are also part of the halakhic application of Torah and the Spirit.¹⁶¹

4.2.4. Gentile Believer Halakhic Status

The commonwealth of Israel is centered around the Jewish identity with their covenant relationship with God initiated at Sinai and renewed in the New Covenant. Gentiles who come to faith join in this commonwealth, but without becoming Jews. When it comes to *halakhah*, Gentiles are not Jews but join the same commonwealth with them. How "Jewish" should their identity be and are they obliged to keep the commandments of Judaism, and to what extent? In *Planted*, Shulam presents an ecclesiology of the people of God with Jewish (Israel) and Gentile (Church) segments, but he does not specify, which commandments Gentile believers are bound to keep and which they are not.

More light on this subject can be found in Shulam and Le Cornu's commentary on Acts 15:12–21, where the issue of the Gentile believers' need for circumcision is deliberated. This chapter is understood as a process of halakhic decision-making, where Peter's testimony of Cornelius and his men receiving the Holy Spirit without circumcision is a legal precedent or *ma'aseh* (מעשה) that works as a source for establishing a ruling. It is further strengthened by Paul and Barnabas' reports about the signs and wonders done among the Gentiles, and James' quotation of Amos 9:11–12.¹⁶²

Ma'aseh is seen as a legal source of great value, because

the halakhic scholar is held to reveal, by his conduct, the active image of the *halakhah* and therefore 'the service of the Torah is greater than the study of it' (Ber. 7b); one of the ways by virtue of which the Torah is acquired is 'attendance of the sages' (Avot 6:5), since practical application of the Torah leads to appreciation of the living and active *halakhah*, its correctness and

¹⁶⁰ Shulam 2008, 99–102; Shulam 2009b, 21.

¹⁶¹ Shulam & Le Cornu 1998, 393–418.

¹⁶² Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 829–833.

creative force. For this reason, it was required of the halakhic scholars to act with much forethought in their day-to-day conduct of halakhic matters¹⁶³

In the apostolic community, it was Peter who introduced the inclusion of the Gentiles to the other authorities. He had the credentials of establishing authoritative rulings based on the "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 16:19) given by Jesus. However, though he had this position, it is not the conduct of Peter that establishes the ruling about Gentiles in Acts 15, but a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit. The legal source of the apostolic decree, then, was not based on scriptural reasoning or a conduct of a respected apostle, but an observed work of God himself. If *ma'aseh* is a significant legal source observed from the life of a human sage, James' "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28) invokes an unquestionable authority.

In this way, the halakhic reasoning of the apostles differs from that of Rabbinic Judaism, because in the latter the miraculous signs or prophesying was excluded from the eligible legal sources in the halakhic discourse. In contrast, the apostolic community of the New Testament understood its *halakhah*, at least the particular ruling concerning the Gentile inclusion in Acts 15, as received through God's prophetic revelation.¹⁶⁴

The apostolic decree declared Gentiles free from the obligation to legally convert to Judaism, and were instead bound by a list of four prohibitions in Acts 15:20 and 29. The Gentiles were obliged to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled and sexual immorality. The first three of these indicate dietary restrictions, namely, food part of which was offered to pagan gods, eating and drinking of blood, which is a taboo in the Old Testament, and things strangled are probably meats slaughtered by strangulation, which is prohibited by Judaism.

This list is quite peculiar, because they hardly make up a comprehensive set of guidelines for religious and moral life, and this has invited several revisions of the text in different manuscripts. Some omit "sexual immorality" or "blood", and many omit "things strangled". Most significantly, some manuscripts add a negative form of the Golden Rule¹⁶⁵ to the list.

Richard I. Pervo suggests that this is the result of the continued development of Christian ethics. The earliest stage of these prohibitions began with "ritual" concerns, but as time went by, they were eventually reinterpreted in more "moral"

¹⁶³ Encyclopaedia Judaica: Ma'aseh.

¹⁶⁴ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 847–848.

¹⁶⁵ καὶ ὅσα μὴ θέλουσιν ἑαυτοῖς γίνεσθαι, ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖν ("and to not do to others what they do not want to happen to them")

terms, understanding "blood" to refer to homicide and violence, and while sacrificial food was a ritual prohibition, it was naturally connected to the Christian rejection of polytheism and idolatry in general. "Things strangled" is least likely to be interpreted in moral terms, so in many cases it has been omitted.¹⁶⁶

Shulam and Le Cornu see the prohibitions in the light of the Jewish tradition of the laws of Noah. The laws of Noah were believed to be the moral imperatives that Noah gave to his sons, and which work as the basis of morality for all humankind, such as prohibitions of idol worship, sexual immorality and murder.¹⁶⁷ The exact enumeration has varied, but maybe the most widely accepted list is the seven: "the prohibitions of idolatry, blasphemy, bloodshed, sexual sins, theft and eating from a living animal, as well as the injunction to establish a legal system"¹⁶⁸. In the Judaism of the first century, there were two different classes of people of non-Jewish background who were in some way or another attached to Judaism: formal converts to Judaism who took on Jewish identity in its fullness, and "godfearers", who stayed as non-Jews but who abided by the laws of Noah and were thus considered "righteous Gentiles". It was the status of these "godfearers" coming to faith in Jesus that created the controversy over circumcision in the early apostolic community.¹⁶⁹

Shulam and Le Cornu note that the prohibitions of things sacrificed to idols, blood, things strangled and sexual immorality are found among the commandments in Lev 17–18 that apply to "strangers who sojourn among" Israelites. They are an important part of the restoration of the "tent of David", or *sukkat David* (סוכת דוד), which refers to the eschatological temple that is not made by man but God, or, in words of Rev 21:22, there is no temple in the future Jerusalem of the messianic age, but God will be its temple. Instead of normal, physical light, the world will be filled with the divine light from the Messiah who is the lamp. In this time "davidic rule is restored to Israel and the undivided nation rules over the neighbouring peoples".¹⁷⁰

In this interpretation, both the temple and the commonwealth of Israel is present, and they comprehend both the restored, undivided people of Israel and the Gentile nations that join it. This "tent of David" is cited by James to support

¹⁶⁶ Pervo 2009, 376–378.

¹⁶⁷ Cf., for example, the Book of Jubilees 7:20ff.

¹⁶⁸ Encyclopaedia Judaica: Noachide Laws. The seven laws are found in Tosefta, tractate Avodah Zarah 9:4, and Talmud Bavli, tractate Sanhedrin 56a–b.

¹⁶⁹ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 25–26.

¹⁷⁰ Shulam & Le Cornu 2012, 833–836.

his ruling of the four prohibitions that are connected to the strangers living among Israel. The word for "stranger" used in Lev 17–18 is *ger* (גר). In pre-exilic times, the term referred to a "resident alien", who was a non-Israelite residing in the land of Israel, and, along with the obligations of Lev 17–18, was entitled by law to be treated as equals with native Israelites (for example, Ex 22:20 and Deut 1:16ff). They had some rights of citizens in ancient Israel. By the late Second Temple period, *ger* came to mean a full proselyte to Judaism who was treated as a Jew in Jewish law, and which is also called *ger tzedek* (גר צדק) in Rabbinic literature. *Ger toshav* (גר תושב), on the other hand, is a term for resident alien in Rabbinic thought, and by their religious commitments they come close to "godfearers" mentioned by Shulam and Le Cornu.¹⁷¹

In Judaism today, it is typical to see the status of a *ger toshav* as non-applicable, because it is tied to residing in the land of Israel and, according to Rabbinic *halakhah*, a *ger toshav* is applicable only when the law of the Jubilee year is in force, and currently it is not. However, there are some rabbis like Moshe Weiner and Yoel Schwartz who suggest it as an identity for Gentiles who wish to join the Jewish community as non-Jews and worship the God of Israel together with the Jews, on the condition of religious commitment to Judaism and observing the seven Noachide commandments, and being formally accepted by a Jewish court of law, and immersion in water. According to Toby Janicki, a Gentile theologian in the Messianic Jewish movement, the apostolic decree of Acts 15 is at least a prototype of a *ger toshav* status represented in Rabbinic literature, and therefore works as a model for a Gentile believer identity within Messianic Judaism. It is important for Janicki that Gentile believers view themselves as joining in Israel, instead of Jews joining them.¹⁷²

Janicki uses the term Messianic Gentile for a *ger toshav* in Messianic Judaism. Messianic Gentiles have a special role that is distinct from Messianic Jews but also from Gentiles in general, Noachides and even Christians. They are children of God, so they are not pagans, and because they embrace Jesus as the Messiah, they are not Noachides either. But because the Messiah has brought Gentiles into Israel, they have an identity that is defined in the Torah interpreted by the apostles. Moreover, Janicki sees Messianic Gentiles not as a part of a

¹⁷¹ Encyclopaedia Judaica: Strangers and Aliens; Janicki 2015, 15–19.

¹⁷² Janicki 2015, 19–22.

denomination of Christianity that is totally separate from Judaism, but as members within a form of Judaism, namely, Messianic Judaism.¹⁷³

Shulam has a similar vision when he talks about turning one's face to Jerusalem. He distinguishes between faith in Jesus from denominations and theological traditions of Christianity. Turning to Jerusalem stands for turning to the roots of faith, and other cities like Rome and Paris stand for traditions of Christianity that are not the roots. Return to roots happens in both Israel and the Church, the whole people of God.¹⁷⁴

Christian theological traditions and denominations are heavily criticized, while the natural Israel is God's chosen people even though the majority still does not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Rabbinic tradition is not infallible, but it is the tradition that has preserved the Bible and to whom the seat of Moses belongs. The Church is the collective of Gentiles that "does not replace Israel but joins with it" as a part of the commonwealth of Israel, an idea very close to Janicki's vision of Messianic Gentiles. It is very obvious that Shulam wants believers in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles, to identify rather with Judaism than Christianity.

5. Conclusions – Theses for Restoration

We have realized that we are not in the process of *reformation*, but rather in the process of *restoration*. We are not looking to Europe or Rome for our inspiration, but rather we are turning our faces toward Jerusalem. We should all turn our faces toward Jerusalem because the next appointment on God's calendar is going to be in Jerusalem. Yeshua is coming back to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, and we need to be ready for his soon return!¹⁷⁵

Messianic Jewish movement is still in its formative stage, but this movement definitely has a significant message to both of its parent religions, Judaism and Christianity. Shulam's texts I have examined are mainly targeted to Christian audiences. He calls for a theological renewal, or restoration, in many areas of faith and practice, but at their core, there is a recurring theme that keeps surfacing in all these areas, and that theme is Israel.

All of Shulam's calls for restoration and return to the roots center around the nation of Israel, but it manifests in different areas and different applications. As a reception and interpretation of Shulam's aspirations regarding the Christian churches, I will formulate his thoughts into theses that I will briefly expound and evaluate, summarizing the findings of this study.

¹⁷³ Janicki 2016, 30–33.

¹⁷⁴ Shulam 2011, 104–115.

¹⁷⁵ Shulam 2011, 115.

Thesis 1: *Israel, the Jewish people, are still and will always be the chosen people of God.* It is the ethnic Jewish people that constitutes the core of the chosen people of God. Election means to Shulam the appointment and duty of the Jewish people to make God the Creator known to all peoples on Earth. The election also means for them a set of “advantages”, the most important of which is the Torah and the rest of the Bible, whose stewards the Jews are called to be. Through the Bible God makes himself known to humankind.

The greatest problem that the election of Israel faces is that of rejecting Jesus, who is the basis of salvation and the new, spiritual birth into the family of God. How can Jews still be the people of God if they are not children of God? Shulam solves the problem by defining the concept of election solely in terms of spiritual calling and duty, and sharply distinguishing it from an individual’s salvation. This solution is innovative, and attractive to all who seek to reconcile the ethnic Israel’s eternal calling with the New Testament ekklesia as the people of God. But does election allow for Shulam’s simple definition on the basis of New Testament exegesis? This question on the exegesis of the term election in the New Testament is beyond the scope of this study, but an interesting topic for further discussion.

Another critical topic regarding the theological and practical significance of Israel is the divisive issue of the modern state of Israel. In Shulam’s indexical understanding of biblical prophecies, the modern Jewish state is not merely a result of geopolitical coincidences irrelevant to faith, but rather a sign that the final redemption of the world is coming closer. This also touches the issue of Israel-Palestine conflict, about which I will not voice my opinion due to its sensitivity.

Thesis 2: *Gentiles who believe in Jesus form the Church, and are grafted into the commonwealth of Israel.* The people of God is a mixed multitude of both Jews and Gentiles who are faithful to the Creator and have their sins forgiven in Jesus. He is emphatic that Gentiles or the Church does not replace Israel but joins with it in the same commonwealth.

But what is the meaning of the commonwealth of Israel for Christians? The implications I have perceived are radical: Gentile Christians should abandon the denominational traditions and see themselves not as part of a church or a denomination of Christianity as opposed to Judaism, but rather part of Israel, and thus, as I understand it, part of a Judaism. This is proven by the significance

Shulam gives to the seat of Moses from Matthew 23. If Jesus' disciples are to take into account the rulings of the "scribes and Pharisees" and if this teaching of Jesus still applies today, it means that the *halakhah* of Judaism today has relevance for the followers of Jesus as well, and that they are in one way or another connected to Judaism.

I see two corollaries for this. Gentiles being part of Judaism, should become aware of their own possibilities to be socially involved with the Jewish community in their own contexts. Those who live close to a local Jewish community should seek social connections with that community. Those who do not may use other media such as the internet for connecting.

Another corollary is the cultivation of consciousness of Israel and Jews and their concerns, and in particular the study of the topics of Judaism that have something to say to non-Jews. The relevance of the Sabbath, the festivals and other "ritual" laws of the Torah should be theologically revisited in the light of the whole canon and early church history and see if traditional theological models should be renewed regarding the observance of these laws. I suggest this would involve the distinction between the categories of obligation and opportunity to keep these laws, for Shulam suggested a practical, empiristic approach and observation of the positive results for keeping, for example, the Sabbath or Passover. If Jews have a special election, that would naturally imply that the categories of obligation and opportunity apply differently to Jewish and Gentile believers. One central text for this distinction is Acts 15.

Halakhic rulings regarding Gentiles should be consulted and evaluated. First and foremost, it is the interpretation of the meaning of the seat of Moses in Matthew 23:2–3 that is the key Scriptural basis for believers in Jesus to relate Rabbinic Jewish teaching. Shulam's interpretation is that the Pharisees on the seat of Moses continue to have relevance today. This means that Christians are to learn and study the Jewish sacred texts and develop at least a rudimentary level of Jewish literacy, and an awareness of the Bible in the light of Jewish paradigms, terminology and traditions, even if one does not personally embrace these Jewish perspectives as a whole.

But at the heart of these corollaries is not only an interfaith dialogue in a pluralistic, multicultural world, but an adoption of Apostle Paul's vision and mission of provoking Jews to jealousy so that they might believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Though Shulam believes the Jewish people are still the elect people of

God, they still need Jesus as their Saviour as Gentiles do. The establishment of the modern state of Israel is the sign that the Jewish people will be restored to their total heritage, including both the physical aspects such as the land of Israel, and the spiritual heritage and roots which are in the Messiah.

All these theological reforms advanced by Shulam are part of his vision of the *Tikkun Olam*, the full restoration of the whole world. Jews and Gentiles abandoning idols and human religious doctrines, and embracing the Messiah as the Saviour of the world. The Bible as the revelation of God, understood and applied in a way that reflects its Jewish context. These are the processes of salvation that will eventually lead the world to a restored state of reconciliation, peace and the knowledge of the Creator, to a unity that reflects the oneness of God. Only through this can humankind be rooted back into the courts of the Temple, and enter again into God's presence on earth.

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